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MORNING STAR

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MORNING STAR

ADA NEGRI

Translated from the Italian
by
ANNE DAY

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TO THEE,
BIANCOLINA,
MY JOY

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MORNING STAR

I

I see—in the long ago—a little girl, thin, erect, agile. But I cannot really tell how her face looks, because in the child's home there is only one small looking-glass, and who knows how many years it has hung there, covered with black and greenish stains, and the child never thinks of looking in it,

and she will not be able, later, to remember what her face was like then.

The little girl's dwelling-place is the porter's lodge of an ancestral palace, in a narrow street in a small city of Lombardy.

In the palace there are but two tenants occupying some rooms on the second floor; a thin old pensioner with his housekeeper Tereson, and a fat old lady who changes her servant every month. The owners live in all the rest of the palace, rich people, belonging to the nobility.

When they come back from a drive, the grating of the great gate must be opened wide for the carriage, and as the grandmother (janitress of the porter's lodge) is too weak because of her years, it is the seven-year-old girl who must do it. It has naturally never occurred to her that such an action could be humiliating to her, but she does not discharge the duty willingly.

The grandmother is very old. She is always knitting stockings and constantly moving her lips, saying words without sound, which are prayers.

She is neither good nor bad. She doesn't tell stories. She is supremely indifferent to everything. Bent, small, lame from her earliest years, with a placid face enclosed in a small black cap tied under her chin, if any trouble or sorrow befalls her she can only mumble one sentence: "As God wills."

So, advanced in years and slow in her motions, she is always pitied by the masters, in her porter's lodge, because, for more than forty years, she has been in the service of the family. She might have retired and gone to her son, who is a school teacher and lives comfortably enough. She does not want to; she prefers to work as long as she can, to the very end.

In her youth she was the trusted maid of Guiditta Grisi, the wonderful contralto, sister of the wonderful soprano, Giuletta. She followed her mistress faithfully on all the stages; from the side scenes she heard the applause of the public; at the theatre doors she saw the wild crowds in their excitement unharness the horses from the singer's carriage; at the inns and during long trips by

diligence she guarded the bags of jewels and of gold, the precious documents and precious costumes.

In silence she heard the Diva swear like a trooper when she was out of temper, in silence she arrayed her for the stage, while she stoically pressed her handkerchief to her mouth to stifle her moans of pain, pain that she had no time to have cared for.

It was to her that the Diva said from her bed, after the first night of her marriage to a magnificent patrician of Cremona, stretching out her arms and dilating her nostrils at the aroma of the coffee:

"Peppina, oh!—at last I am Countess Barni!"

It was she who accompanied her to the villa of the noble family of the Robeccos on the Oglio, there to be her watchful nurse until her death, when an insidious disease, not cured in the roots of its beginning, was to be the cause of her death at the height of her fame and of her love.

From her bed of intense pain, the singer tried

the long notes, the attacks and the trills of her prime.

"Peppina, my voice still lives."

At the point of death she murmured to her husband:

"Count Barni, I trust Peppina to you—" And the faithful follower remained with him as a legacy. She humbly and devotedly assumed the care of the house; she brought up her children, a boy and a girl; she shared the fortunate lot of her master until, he himself having died, the estate passed to a degenerate branch of the family.

In the doorkeeper's lodge, which became the last stopping-place of old Peppina, some remembrances of Giuditta Grisi were preserved.

There was a portrait, an old engraving in a black frame, the bosom bare to below the shoulders, a slender, beautiful neck, very short puffed sleeves, a pointed face, not beautiful but of reserved intensity, under the hair piled high, with smooth bands on the forehead and three puffs on top of the head.

There was a dressing-case for the coach, very heavy, of massive walnut. It is locked; inside perhaps there are kept the records of the streets that she travelled over, the things that she saw, the adventures that she met with.

There was a curious workbox, also for use in her travels, made of a roll of Russian leather tenaciously keeping its scent, with a lining of discolored pink velvet, divided into many small compartments.

The child loves these things with a sense of despotic ownership. She knows the story of them, and, gazing at the portrait, sitting on the dressing-case, caressing the faded pink velvet of the workbox, she tells it over to herself, silently, with eager joy.

It is one of her personal possessions, of which she is jealous. She thinks: "I, too, shall go on the stage."

Hard by the porter's lodge is a low, ugly room, dark, with a matrimonial bed in which three of them sleep, grandmother, mother, and child. There

are chests of drawers, a small table, a few chairs, and a curtain with grey and blue stripes, behind which, against one wall, for lack of a wardrobe, the garments are hung.

That curtain is the stage curtain. The child lifts it when she wishes to. The limp hanging dresses (dresses of cleanly poverty) are filled out, when she wills it, with bones and flesh; hands and heads appear by themselves, voices come from them—all pure illusion. Giuditta Grisi sings. The imaginary public applauds.

A real public sometimes attends these performances, the children of the masters of the house, Maura, Clelia, Pia, three beautiful names, three beautiful little girls. They listen in silence, with open eyes, to the stories on the stage, they laugh softly. One of them, the prettiest, the least good, always has the sharpness of a derisive scoffer in her eyes and on her lips. She cares nothing, neither for Grisi nor for the fantastic stories, nor for the theatre of rags. The little artist suffers from this in her heart; she is wounded by it, just like some-

one who gives the best of himself and feels that he is not understood.

But the secret grief does not last long. It is enough for one of them to cry:

"Let's go and play!" and they rush headlong into the garden.

The garden is always green with pines, magnolias, and a cedar of Lebanon. There are few flowers, much grass, deep shade, and well-known hiding-places. There is not a more beautiful garden in the world.

The children play tag like four arrows, then ball; each one has her own, and you must bounce it back into the palm of your hand, twenty, fifty, one hundred times, without the hand's missing a single hit. Rivalry excites them; most of all the little poetess is excited.

After ball, the jumping rope, once or twice at a jump, jumping on one foot (called "zoppin, zoppetta") until the foot stumbles, then leaping from the steps of the great stairway of honor,

higher and higher, at the risk of falling with a crash.

Joy of youth, tension of will, unconscious grace of muscles and nerves in action.

The thin little lodgekeeper gives in to no one. She shows in her vaulting the cold courage of the tight-rope walker; she wishes at any cost to get ahead of Pia, who is the nimblest and seems made of india rubber. It is a miracle that she does not break her ankle or her collar-bone, but she wants to be first, she must be first, because she is poor.

It is seven o'clock, and my mother comes back from the factory. Oh, now indeed, life is different.

My mother is no longer young (she married late in life) and already has many grey hairs, but her voice is loud and clear, a girl's voice, and everything about her is bright and energetic; her step, her motions, her look, her words. She lived before her marriage at the country seat at Robecco on the Oglio, with my grandmother, until after

her thirtieth year. After she was married she was a seamstress, making up white goods. Left a widow and in the direst poverty, she had to take a place as worker in a factory for the spinning and weaving of woolen goods.

She earns less than fifty cents a day and works thirteen spinning hours, often obliged to labor until noon on Sunday.

But she is gay and she laughs, a small and vocal creature like the birds, and she chatters and sings. There live in her the quivering wings of sparrows, an ever renewed buoyancy, such fresh sympathy for things and creatures that she overflows with the limpidity of springs in the grass, and has their iridescent transparency. She does not carry about with her the dusty and serious air of a woolen factory, but rather the sharp breath of a puff of March wind, rough to the skin, full of sunshine and vitality.

Like the grandmother and the child, she lives on bread, milk, and polenta, and it is perhaps her severe temperance that makes her so nimble.

When the chatter of the servant maids in the lodge is over, the little girl goes to bed, towards half past nine, and the door between the two rooms stays open. Quite hidden under the counterpane and pretending to sleep, she laughs, laughs in her soul, because she knows that the hour of wonder is about to strike.

About then, very soon, her mother, in her clear voice, thinking that the little child is asleep, begins to read aloud. To amuse the grandmother, and for her own delight, she reads, number by number, the novels in the supplements of a daily paper.

She does not know that the little one is listening, with attentive ears and a receptive heart.

How many people there are, how many beings more alive, more wicked, more interesting, than those we meet every day, on the street, at home, at school! All are her friends: Rocambole, Remigio the orphan, the baker's wife, and Rigoletta and Flower of Mary, from the "Mysteries of Paris."

Stories of vast intrigues, of romantic love, of dramatic crimes, form the foundations of her knowledge, blended with the never to be forgotten voice of her mother, and the yellowish light of an oil lamp, shining through the open door at the risk of obliterating the theatre curtain with grey and blue stripes and the portrait of Giuditta Grisi.

A few years later, the little girl, grown rather taller, but still untrained and eager for wonderful stories, finds a pile of the novels of Alexandre Dumas the elder in a secret repository; from "The Three Musketeers" to "Ange Pitou."

Ugly old books, yellowed, torn, worn at the corners, lacking pages here and there; but nothing matters. It is to her like climbing into a ship and crossing the sea.

She reads and reads and reads. She slights and hurries her school work, so that she can read. She lives and breathes in story-land. A sense of joy, of entire well-being, fills her at each new bloody tale. She carries on conversations of dazzling intensity with the personages of these fantastic ro-

mances. She imagines them and sees them, before and around her, with characteristics of face and gesture which cannot be mistaken.

And when, later, the thoughtless kindness of Tereson the housekeeper (good Mr. Antonio cannot live without books either) leaves in her hands the suggestive and silly volumes from a circulating library, and the thirteen-year-old student discovers Emile Zola, her secret joy becomes terrible, like an obsession.

The impure pages, in which vice is more crudely pictured and from which obscenity breathes fouler odors, will pass over her spirit leaving no trace, like water over marble, so pure is she; but the mass of the books, so solid and bleeding with humanity, will press upon her with all its weight. She will become sick with a painful malady of the soul, which will make her different from the girls of her own age. Absent-minded, sometimes dejected, she will give her teachers themes that are disturbing, unbalanced, glowing with imagery and with troubled and confused recollections.

But she does not like school. There is no relation, no sympathy at all between her and systematic, scholastic methods. She is quiet, she works, she forces herself to understand, knows that she ought to do so and that she cannot rise in rebellion; but, at bottom, the only thing she wants is to escape. She wants to prepare herself to be a teacher, simply because she does not mean to work herself to death in a factory like her mother, or become a maid-servant in her youth and a portress in her old age, like her grandmother.

Now that she is almost a young girl, she feels her face flame and then turn green when she has to open the great gate for the masters of the house, returning from their afternoon drive, and she swallows her bitterness and breathes quickly when she has to deliver the letters or do some errand. She does not envy the luxury of the "idle rich"; she does not even notice it. Nor does the delicious food make her mouth water, so much has the habit of temperance in eating become second nature. But she will not be a servant.

That porter's lodge!—Odious, with its ground-glass windows towards the street, and its double doors of transparent glass towards the inner court; odious, with its bell that clangs whenever anyone comes in and you have to answer:—"Yes, no, the ladies and gentlemen are at home, or not at home—"

And reception days, with all the carriages at the door and all the ladies rustling in silk and velvet, who look down upon you or don't even see you, or else they smile at you with foolish benevolence, and this makes you grow paler still.

They go upstairs to visit the lady of the palace. She is a majestic female, who was rather good-looking in her youth, but now she is breathless with fat and suffers from *hypertrophy* of the heart. She would be kind, but her manners are too haughty and sharp, because she is conscious of her own goodness. She governs her household with the energy of a ship's captain, and day and night she incessantly smokes long, acrid Virginia cigars.

She bears no ill-will towards the little portress,

and yet she has the secret of scourging her until the blood flows, just by a few cutting words.

One day she snatched her composition book out of her hands, turned it hastily, as you turn the pages of a memorandum book, read it cursorily here and there, and gave judgment:

"This is not your own ["not the flour from your own sack"]. It is pilfered, borrowed, away with it! You read too many bad novels, child."

The little girl, who just then feels herself a woman, protests with repeated "Nos," more with her head than with her voice. No, no, indeed she had not stolen it. But her face is green with pallor and her eyes are angry. It seems to her as if all her life she will see before her the big, vigorous lady, smelling of cigars, snatching away her notebook and saying, "It's not yours, you are lying."

And she hates her as she hates the porter's lodge. But she feels her rancor growing within her one morning—the morning of the lilies.

A whole bed of lilies, blooming almost unexpectedly along the eastern wall of the garden that

June morning. Lilies in the sun: she can see nothing else. Yesterday they were still in bud, but who has ever been able to be present at the exact moment of the opening of a flower?

She goes very quietly nearer to the miracle of the spotless white calyxes, erect on their long stems, with golden stamens in their hearts.

It seems to her a festal day because the lilies have blossomed. She feels as if she were in church, and the perfume she breathes in recalls the holy communion. She stretches out her hand as if to pray, but from one of the windows opening on the garden comes the harsh voice of the mistress: "Hallo, there, I say! Don't touch the flowers! Look out for yourself if you take a lily!"

She did not want to touch them. She was only standing in adoration. That woman has profaned everything. Will there always be a voice to accuse her of being a thief whenever she holds out her arms and her soul towards beauty? Is it a sin to love beauty?

There is something irreconcilable between her

and the lady, which grows with the growing years; enmity without forgiveness, separating her from all those people who need someone to open the gate when they drive home in their carriages, and who do not wish to be robbed of the flowers that delight the eyes of the world.

But the garden is all her own when it snows, and the windows are barred, and no one dares to put the tip of his nose outside.

Silence: real silence of flesh and blood that you can touch with your hand; such breathing silence that it can be heard, like a person sleeping.

Between the ground-glass window towards the street and the vast framed panes towards the porch, the porter's lodge lies in the palest light of dawn. In that spectral whiteness, grandmother, motionless in her easy-chair, seems a figure of stone.

Snow and more snow falls in the garden, puts caps on the trees and the bushes; covers the benches with downy cushions, almost blue if you

look steadily; embroiders the cornices and the balusters; tells the girl so many things that she tries to understand and is too young to comprehend. It is like a kind of long discourse in an unknown tongue, full of sweet, mysterious pauses. How the cold snow burns in her hands! Everything has grown smaller and lower; the walls look blackish, dark with stains, and livid; the air has a strange smell; one's breath grows short in the whirlwind of white flakes falling on the white ground.

She thinks that she is left alone in the world. No more masters, no more school, nothing any more, not even her mother. Her soul expands, she becomes lighter and lighter, she becomes part of the snow, a snowflake, she disappears in the whiteness.

One spring morning, the garden cast a spell upon her.

She had to get up very early, at dawn, an unusual thing. But hardly had she come out from the porch than she forgot what she had to do, because

of listening, enraptured, to the trees talking. They were all talking softly to each other in the half-light. Laughter, questions, answers, jests, exclamations. Oh, of course she knows that it is the chatter of the birds, chirping in the joy of their first awakening. But the illusion was so vivid and sudden, that she would not give it up, and preferred to believe that birds and trees form one single loving creature that comes to talk with her; and, turning her eyes upwards, the better to welcome the confidences of the living green, she received for the first time the first clear sense of a sky.

The sky of dawn, violet, ashen-grey, and rose, with innumerable light clouds that pass and pass, changing color and holding each other by the hand. As if the sky were saying to them: "Here I am, look upon me; will you come to walk with me?" And it became a part of her or she entered into companionship with the clouds, and ever with the innocent prattle of the garden in her ears. Well, then, was not the sky there yesterday? and day before yesterday? and will it not be there to-

morrow? Why especially this morning had she become aware of it?

Things are very near to her, transparent; they have eyes and breath, they speak in a language of their own. She clasps her hands over her heart to keep in its happiness.

She becomes the absolute mistress of the garden in summer, when the lords of the manor have gone to the country. She sometimes misses her playmates, but she grieves for nothing.

She has her own kingdom.

She knows it all by heart, she has it all in her blood, from the tiniest little pebble of the most hidden retreat to the rustiest leaf of ivy twining by its stem to a corner of the wall. Stretched out upon her stomach, her elbows buried in the earth, she rejoices in the hours of the dog-days with the delight of a lizard, reading some one of her magical books. She sees the ants file by, she hears the big flies buzz, the crickets chirp, the branches rustle, the bells ring. She feels the good earthy warmth

sinking into her, and it seems to her as if she could live on so forever. She has a great many friends in the garden; and each one wishes her well in his fashion. The juniper which bears such bitter sea-green berries looks down upon her in a rather lordly way; but the salty herb is so pleasant to chew, so sharp and stimulating to the tongue!

The foolish yellowish-red roses that climb the wall on the west, behind the three magnolias of hard, shining, emerald green, laugh at her, pricking her fingers, and shed their petals suddenly in her hands; but the grove of slender birch trees leads her gently into the sun-embroidered shade to a padlocked barrier that has a view of a little street. That small lane pleases her. She thinks: "It's mine."

She is deeply in love with the sun. She knows that it is more resplendent in July, more intense in August, more restful in September; and that nothing is more soothing to the eyes than a pale ray of sunlight on the roofs in February, when it

is thawing and only a few last flecks of snow shine white here and there under the tiles.

She could, like a sun-dial, tell the precise time of day according to the place in the garden where the sunlight falls.

She delights in standing at the street door of the porter's lodge; leaning against a corner or else seated on a stone step. How many odors the street has! It smells of ripe grapes and of medlars in the autumn; of baked pears and of hot roast meat in winter; and of oranges towards Christmas, because of the carts that the fruit peddlers push around, with strange rhythmic calls which give her a sense of distant flourishing countrysides, never seen and yet remembered.

In the summer months the burning sun peels the plaster from the walls, and makes them so dazzling that sleep comes by looking hard at them. Red and yellow awnings are lowered over the show windows of the merchants; the ribbon of sky that stretches between the two parallel lines of roofs

is a blade of burning metal. It is sweet to do nothing, to lie down on the stones that burn, smelling heavy perfumes and breathing in the warmth.

But what the child cannot succeed in explaining to herself is how it is that in February and March, especially after several heavy showers, the air may smell of violets. There are no flower shops in the streets, yet the air smells of violets. She will say to her mother when she comes home from the factory: "On Sunday, shall we go for violets?"

Oh, yes, they can be found, she knows, beyond the gate, looking up tenderly from the sunny fields, on the still wintry banks. But that perfume in the air is dearer to her than real violets that you can crush in your hands.

In the shops everybody is working. The people know her, they make signs of greeting: "Good cheer, brown little girl!" Exactly opposite, a carpenter's saw shrieks hissing through the wood; a cobbler, at his little table, taps on the nails fixed in the leather; the saw asks questions, the ham-

mer answers; the street shines with the joy of them.

Who knows why, as she listens to the harmonious dialogue, there comes into her mind what she was taught as truth, by teachers and by books, when she was hardly able to understand it, and that is, that we are all brothers?

Then the cobbler, Panin, black with tar, with a face that seems to be carved out of the leather of the old shoes that he is handling, and the carpenter, Vincenzo, with his big, crooked nose and his thick curls always powdered with sawdust, are her brothers. And the workmen in the factory, too. And the gentlefolks. And all the men and all the women that pass by without even giving her a glance; and no one of them is like her, and there is no one of them who resembles another one of them.

Curious! And yet it is beautiful.

But she herself, who is she?

Whence did she come? Why did she come? And not before and not after, but just *now?* Who can be sure that she did not exist before, and that she

will not always live, like the air, the sun, the earth, and all other things that are?

She tries as hard as she can to concentrate the whole power of her mind on the meaning of the words, "I am."

To be; auxiliary verb. Things that they teach you at school. But, "I am. I am!"

A phrase that is like a well; and the deeper the mind sinks in it, the more do darkness and nothingness undermine it from below. She is happy to feel herself sinking like this. And if anyone at these times speaks to her, asks her something, she does not understand, she does not answer; and he is met by two wide, inattentive, frigid eyes; hard, unfriendly.

In school they ought surely to explain to her the mystery of her presence in the world. Instead they keep on stuffing her memory with an infinite number of useless facts that rasp her within: numbers, addition, division, fractions; rules of grammar, histories of people dead centuries ago. Are they perhaps afraid to talk of such a thing?

But her companions care nothing about it. They do not think her thoughts; rather it seems to her that they do not think at all.

Within the four walls of the class-room, sitting on a bench and obliged to turn her mind to the right and to the left according to the will of the teacher, she feels as if she were in prison. She is sure, she is very sure, that she would learn many more things, much clearer and more important ones, idling about all alone on the threshold of the porter's lodge.

She has found a singular way of freeing herself, when it becomes too hard for her to fix her mind, motionless, upon the words that issue from the teacher's mouth.

She holds her breath, with her lips and her teeth hermetically sealed, for one minute, for two, until her face is petrified in pale rigidity, and her heart beats violently. There is always some kind friend who notices it, becomes alarmed, and informs the teacher; who says, "What is the matter? Do you feel ill? Go out and get a little air in the hall."

She goes out with the step of a sleep-walker. She knows how to play a part, and she is proud of it; at the same time she begins to believe herself that she feels ill, very ill. And she cannot succeed in enjoying those few minutes of stolen liberty; a mantle of sadness crushes her, and life seems as empty as that vestibule.

How many teachers, from the infant class onwards! Why, in each new grade, must one change teachers? Is not her mother a special one? But none of them is as good as her mother. No one is always right like her mother.

In the fourth elementary she finds, however, a very fine teacher, whom the general opinion of the little city has thought for years the phoenix of instructors, Giovanna Santafè. In the little city there is no one ignorant of the name and merits of Giovanna Santafè. Giovanna Santafè is the descendant of a noble family of failing fortune, and from her birth she has kept a reserved pride and an impeccable distinction of manners. In her free hours she gives private lessons to young

ladies of noble families, and in that circle she makes herself respected and feared. In her classes, although she never raises her voice, discipline is absolute; and there are never any back-sliders there, because her method is so perfect that it permits no failures in examinations. She will certainly be appointed director of the school.

Between Giovanna Santafè and her pupils there is a measureless distance. Her turned-up nose seems straight, so stiffly does she hold her head. But, by the grace of God, even she has a weakness. She cannot bear the first white hairs of her forty years, and she dyes her hair an inky and greasy tint, for which reason sometimes on her temples there is black perspiration.

On a warm morning in June, after an absence of ten minutes, Giovanna Santafè appeared before the scholars, for the first time, with a disturbed face. She climbs up to her desk and says solemnly, in a voice that does not seem to be her own:

"Giuseppe Garibaldi is dead."

Who had ever seen her cry before?

And now she is weeping. But she does not wipe her eyes. She lets the tears fall, so that we all can see them running down her bony olive cheeks, down to her stiff but trembling chin. Her weeping is meant for an example. Many little heads, indeed, are bowed over the benches, and here and there a sob bursts out.

But the grandchild of the old portress, Peppina, sits with dry eyes. She cannot succeed in feeling sorrow because Giuseppe Garibaldi is dead. Giuseppe Garibaldi? She sees him with golden hair, with a bright red mantle as in the innumerable portraits, galloping on a white horse into countries unknown to her, and which, perhaps, she will never know; or else as an old man but always girded with gold and with scarlet, on an island rough with rocks, between two azure seas.

Thus she sees him. Of such beauty that it is dazzling.

He is not a man.

He does not belong to the living; he does not belong to the dead—he is a picture.

She cannot weep for him; she doesn't know how. The more so that, finding herself on the first bench, very near the teacher and her desk, her very dry eyes discern too well, parallel to the tears drawing lines on her cheeks, two drops of black sweat, of an oily dye, slowly trickle from the roots of the hair down upon the forehead of the perfect schoolmistress, Giovanna Santafè.

My grandmother grows too old and weary. It is no longer possible for her to raise herself from her arm-chair. And lo, one day my uncle comes, the eldest son of my grandmother, and he controls a small pension for country children who want to go to city schools. He comes with a carriage to take his mother to his own house, where at last she may rest.

"It's good-bye for thee, Peppina," murmurs the old lady as if to herself, bent but neat under her little cap and her shawl; coming out from the porter's lodge, surrounded by her son, her daughter,

and her granddaughter. She has already taken leave of the masters and their children, humbly begging to be excused from having sometimes failed in her duty, and the big gentlewoman, with a few quick, kind words, has put a few lire in her hands. With her back bent nearly to the ground—she has already passed before the portrait of Giuditta Grisi and her travelling case—"It's good-bye for thee, Peppina,"—then a kiss to her daughter, one to her grandchild:

"Good-bye, Vittoria, good-bye, Dinin"—and the carriage bears her away.

A few months later, Dinin comes, called in great haste to pay her respects to her dead grandmother at her new home in the Street of the Orphans.

She finds her again, quiet and composed as ever, with her inscrutable face framed in the lace of her finest cap, only she has no more wrinkles. She keeps her eyes closed, and she is not knitting stockings, but she crosses her hands on her breast and is praying with them, because her mouth is motionless. Perhaps she died from the suffering of

not being able to work any longer. So death comes for the first time to the girl, in familiar guise, in chaste serenity.

But by the side of her grandmother's bed there stands silently among the relatives a fifteen-year-old boy, of a girlish beauty. He is the first-born of Vittoria, the factory hand, whom her uncle took with him when he was a baby, to help his sister, when she was left a widow without a half-penny, in beggary.

Dinin sees him seldom. She is almost shy with him. Why is he so handsome? Neither the girl nor the mother is beautiful. Why have they never played together?

She knows that he thinks himself disliked by his mother, barely tolerated by his uncle. He even has a confused impression of something unjust, which is not her fault, which is no one's fault, except that of poverty. And whenever she looks at him she tries to smile at him, to be very sweet to him, and she calls him Nani, to shorten his name that is too long; and as if in play she lets

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herself be grasped by her shoulders by those hands that are all muscle, but she feels pain, such pain.

That day beside the bed where his grandmother lies in peace, Nani is visibly on tenter-hooks. His lower lip and the muscles of his left cheek twitch uncontrollably. His eyes stare at the floor or the walls, avoiding the sorrowful sight. Everything about him has a look of flight.

Death, which his sister can contemplate with almost conscious composure, frightens him.

With the departure of the grandmother, the porter's lodge was, of course, left untenanted, and the mother and daughter were able to retire to two microscopic little rooms under the roof, in the same palace.

An unbearable weight was lifted from the girl's heart. The two small rooms look out onto the garden. She no longer rambles there with the three young daughters of the mistress, she no longer possesses it as its absolute ruler, as before in the

holiday months, but now it seems more her own because she looks down into it from above.

She is now no longer subject to anybody.

The independence in which she rejoices, increased by the daily absence of her mother, develops within her, even to the degree of fulness that becomes joy, a sense already alive in her; the sense of time. She hears time run by, in the dear solitude of her own days. It is as if she were telling over the beads of a rosary made of those stones of ancient amber, that seem to hold the sun within their substance. She is only disturbed at school-time, for her these were lost hours. She is not happy except when, far from the people that she has to meet, she can regain the consciousness of herself, in its entirety, becoming one with the perfect round of the sunny hours, in the gradual growth, intensity, and decrease of daylight.

In winter a meagre little fire is enough to heat the tiny kitchen. The frost etches fantastic forests on the window panes, through which the girl

gallops without a bridle. A cushion of worn cotton with red flowers covers the travelling case of Giuditta Grisi. Here sits sideways opposite the girl, squatting on a little stool, the son of her mother, the few times that he seeks her out.

He comes in a rush, he leaves in a rush. He has always that fragile complexion, that unhealthy beauty that seems womanish, that mocking laugh that curls his lip, and a way, in sitting, of leaning entirely on his left shoulder, raising his right shoulder as high as his cheek.

He never owns a red cent.

"Are you in funds, Dinin?"

Oh, yes, she always has some money put by; she, who at fourteen is already working, giving private lessons as well as she can to some child in the elementary school, who wants to get ahead in her classes. Everything costs so much!—writing paper and charcoal, crayons for drawing, and then the copy-books, the atlases, the text-books. There are the taxes, too, and her mother, poor thing, how little she earns. Cares and poverty, and it would

be so lovely to give oneself up in ease, as one pleases, to the passing of time.

Her brother? But perhaps he is not her brother. Sometimes she thinks that this is an impossible thing that this son of her mother who does not live under her roof, should be her brother.

And yet she loves him.

He is not like her. The delicacy of his features is almost excessive, the quickness of his gestures and of his eyes makes one dizzy. Only a passion for books, common to them both, makes them glow in earnest talk.

He interpolates much in his talk, too many Latin words, since he was a brilliant scholar at the High School; but his uncle forced him to leave it for the Normal School, as it costs too much to complete the classical course. And now he has come down in the world. Taken from his Latin, he no longer works with a will. He quarrels with the professors, he starts discussions in class, airing legal quibbles. He makes himself feared and hated, he has already attacked one of the masters, the most pedantic,

to be sure, in a student's magazine of miscellany, called "The Whip."

Perhaps, at his first act of bravado, they will dismiss him from the school, perhaps he will not be able to finish his studies. He is predestined to a Bohemian life; he is one of the race of those to whom natural talent serves as a stone around the neck of a man who throws himself into the water. His sister knows that he has a sweetheart, Daria, the daughter of Ignazia, a fat midwife who keeps a fruit shop in the Street of Santa Maria of the Sun. They go to dances in a small mean students' coffee-house, on nights when Nani succeeds in stealing the door-key without his uncle's knowing it. They are both very handsome; she with an oval face, white as marble, lighted up by immense, prominent blue eyes, almost without eyebrows; he, all suppleness, a real ballet dancer, of devilish agility in the double waltz step, of unequalled endurance in the whirlings of the galops; both able to dance together until four o'clock in the morning without a shadow of weariness.

"Is it really necessary to make love, Nani?" his sister asks him, opening wide upon him two eyes of troubled innocence, although she reads so many books.

"Don't bother about such things, Dinin!" laughs the odd youth. "Work, be good, be the true daughter of your mother; you wouldn't understand."

"But our uncle? If he should come to know about it?"

"Let our uncle alone. Let him drink. If you knew how much he drinks! He has enough to do to get jolly and then to reproach me with big boasting words for the bread that I eat in his house. If my mother—if my mother—but you know what I mean. Perhaps now I should be a good workman."

The very truth is out.

A taste of gall, that leaves bitterness in the mouth.

But, however, he knows that if it had not been his uncle it would have been an orphan asylum; that two children with their grandmother in the porter's lodge (one child is enough—let it go!)

would not have been allowed by the owners of the house. It is nobody's fault.

His sister would have liked to tell him these things, but he does not take any notice of her, he can't even stand still. He takes up a book, glances at it, tosses it away. His thoughts are who knows where. Suddenly he jumps out with:—

"Have you read 'Les Misérables'?" And he begins to impersonate Gavroche with the unconscious ease of an actor. Then:—"See what I have learned!" And then and there, a fantastic clown, he makes the bones of his wrists and his shoulder blades crack in a kind of wild contortion, which gives her the shudders. He cracks everything, body and soul. Where are his roots? He has no roots. And there is something tempestuous in the gesture of farewell with which he seizes her by the shoulders and kisses her on the mouth.

Then he rushes downstairs, four steps at a time; and his careless whistling, which you might take for the sound of an ocarina or a flute, disappears from the garden and down along the street.

No, her mother is not at fault.

What could she have done?

Under the pressure of necessity she accepted help from where it came to her.

She did not think that in this way she was forsaking her son. Who but herself remembers his blond curls and his charming ways when he was two years old? Sometimes she used to tell about the time before he was born when she already loved him, and called him her dear, dear little one.

Even when he was eighteen months old she used to have long talks with him, and in the street everyone admired him. He looked like the Infant Jesus.

But—thirteen hours a day in a factory, for the wage of one lira and seventy-five centesimi—could she be expected to bring up two children?

For years and years she has worked hard enough to break her back and she never succeeds in getting rid of weariness, and, to deceive herself, she sings; could anyone ask more of her?

The girl, who thinks of all this and carries it as a burden on her heart, adores her mother with infinite love. Her mother is the only creature who can share her real inner life without disturbing her. So different from herself, she is yet as necessary to her as the sense of existence, and, together, they make one of those monotonous but harmonious two-part choirs, a third above, a third below, that, sung by the peasants, fill the countryside with peaceful joy.

When the north winds of summer blow, never, it seems, at night, after having eaten their soup and a bit of bread with some fruit, together, arm in arm, they go off to Benediction, in the neighboring church of Santa Maria del Carmine.

Soft lights, sweet odor of incense, paper flowers, and breathings of the organ; common, unknown people, all good while they are praying; charm of mystical dreaminess; solemn litanies intoned in chorus; assurance of God the father; peace of mind.

Then, still arm in arm, they go towards the ram-

parts, to eat two cents' worth of watermelon. The sky is wide over the horse-chestnut trees, the atmosphere is always so filled with the last reflections of the setting sun that all the air is resplendent with glowing red; but a star already flickers in the azure sky. The watermelon carts, under the trees, offer queer red moons, among bright, swinging Japanese lanterns: "Slices of moon for a penny, oh! Who wants the moon for a penny!"

Everybody crowds to the benches. They toss money, they make jokes, they plunge their faces into the icy pulp, they bathe in the flowing, watery juice, with laughter and jests, witticisms and songs. Mother and daughter seem like sisters, in the joy of sinking their solid white teeth in the fruit that is so fresh that it has the color of fire.

"Do you know, this is nothing at all. If you had seen! When I was at Robecco on the Oglio, with the Barnis—"

The memories of my mother are beautiful, vivid and full of the gentle warmth of spring. Plains as

wide as the sea, rooms as large as market-places, orchards as vast as parks! She herself, a troublesome little creature, rather plain but luminous, who never broke her ankles clambering like a monkey up the trees, nor ever poisoned herself by eating green apples and unripe wild cherries. And she told of a hundred adventures, and a hundred wonders.

"When I was at Robecco on the Oglio—" Now she is a poor grey-haired factory hand, and she wears a black shawl. But even when it happens that her daughter comes to the mill, and enters the great room of the weavers' looms where she works, and she sees her mother appear before her, dishevelled, dusty, with a dirty apron, in the midst of the din of the transmission, the regular movements of the machines, and the wheeling force of the big belts, small and poor as she is, to her child she seems tall and grave, clothed with nobility and authority.

And she feels—yes, indeed,—a secret pride at being the daughter of such a mother. Only from

her, and not by words but by deeds, there comes to her the knowledge of how to live.

A chant with organ accompaniment, in a bare church full of poor people who are listening to the mass; such is their lives. But once in a while a discordant note pierces the quiet, and you cannot tell whether it may be laughing derisively, or whether it may be weeping, breaking the grave harmony of the whole. . . . It is Nani.

The factory is beyond the gate.

A stony, steep little lane leads to it, called by the work-people "la montade," that means, in their dialect, the ascent; thinking certainly more of their weary return at night than of going up in the morning, with rested bodies and fresh strength.

Great black letters on the front; two names that mean money, command, power; the only ones in the woolen industry in the little city.

A group of low buildings, white, with roofs of opaque glass, as in America; a very high chim-

ney that cuts the sky in two, and "makes the clouds out of smoke," thinks Dinin.

Clouds and clouds of smoke, in spirals, in piles, of a blackish grey, filthy, heavy, over the factory that bears on its façade such important names. From the windows, the rhythmical and harsh "tin-tan-tan, tin-tan-tan" of the machinery in motion; within, the inexorable regularity of the mechanism of labor, solidly constructed and solidly directed: the whole an admirable working instrument, from the first of the directors to the last of the spinners; from the motor in a cage like a wild beast, to the humblest of the brake-wheels. Discipline is of iron in that place; faults, according to their degree, are punished by fines and dismissals. The operators, more than five hundred of them, accept the ridiculous and insufficient wages with difficulty, but necessity obliges them to do it. Times are still hard because of the unions and the strikes, which are beginning to be talked about, but in an undertone, as of a cataclysm which may turn the world upside down. And, meanwhile: "Damn the gentle-

folks! The day will certainly come. Cursed be poverty!"

Vittoria's daughter observes, listens, confirms, and buries everything in her heart, with the apparent indifference of the earth receiving the sowing. Her mother never complains. Having became assistant forewoman in the spinning department, the more difficult she finds her duty, the more gayly courageous is her will to discharge it. First to appear in the morning, last to leave at night, she shirks nothing that it is within her power to do. She does not leave an idle word unpunished, nor a lost shuttle, nor a poorly made knot.

She accomplishes the work that is expected of her, and expects from her subordinates that their work should be as perfect as a work of art, and as if their earnings were magnificent. She has the manner of a soldier in time of war, who obeys orders at any cost, knowing that it is a question of life or death. The superintendent says:

"If only everyone were like Vittoria!"

Is it a good thing or a bad one? She gives of her very self for a little more than nothing, just what a partner would give.

And is she not indeed a partner? And if so, why is she paid so little? Her daughter asks her this. She answers her: "Oh, my darling, the world is like that!"

Through intimacy with her mother, the daughter dives into a tangle of men, interests, and passions. She knows all the work-people; the jaundiced face and the pride of Mompalao, who will not remit a fine; the coarse good nature of Consonni, who on Sunday goes to drink at the public house with the principals and for this is watched by the managers—who, unfortunately, will not take root in the factory; the severity and the ugly policeman's face of Ranalli, charged with searching pockets at leaving time, and, to be sure, no one could discharge such a disgusting office better than he, who had Rosalinda dismissed, the mother of four little children, on account of a skein of tangled yarn found upon her, under her apron.

That inspection! "Mother, didn't you feel like dying of shame, when you had to turn your pockets inside out?"

"Daughter, everything has to be borne. It's best not to think about it. Cheer up!"

They tell of certain fairies of long ago, at the touch of whose magic fingers, or at the sound of their magical words, a rock was transformed into a flowering tree, tears into pearls and diamonds, sighs into the melodious sweetness of songs. In my ever-laughing mother perhaps there lived again one of those fairies, the dispensers of simple marvels.

Sundays in fair weather, hallelujah! we go boating. Our companions are always the same: Orsola, the squint-eyed weaver, who knows as much nonsense as she has threads on her loom; Francescone and Sergentin, machinists; the two Vestri sisters, Emma fair, and Matilda dark; all the people who live at Revellino, beyond the bridge. Jokes, coarse jests—who likes them? But the youngest in gayety, the readiest in fun

and in uproarious mirth, is the ever-laughing Vittoria.

Francescone and Sergentin have the oars. Small boats and skiffs skim over the water with merry haste, meeting smiles and eyes as they pass. Swimmers splash with sturdy strokes; but their dripping heads on a level with the water, as if they were detached from their bodies, have a fixed expression of pain which the daughter of Vittoria is perhaps the only one to notice, and her heart beats and she cannot control herself.

She lies curled up silently, on the bottom of the boat. All that sea-green water, luminous with sun, dazzles her eyes. Her companions think that she is proud and holds herself aloof because she is studying in the Normal School, and that she will never soil her hands with carding wool and with the black oil of the wheels; and they look askance at her with a little mistrust. On the contrary, she is simply afraid; afraid of the water, and she won't confess it, for pride.

She does not like that element, without form,

without compassion, that she cannot hold still in her hand nor trample under her foot; uncertain, changeful, treacherous, which comes and goes, which is, but is not, which laps and capsizes. It does not give her confidence, it does not leave her with liberty and serenity for thought. It always seems to her to be lying in wait. She never succeeds in understanding the natural laws by which a boat floats on the water. Closing her eyes, she imagines to herself the moment in which one might drown, and the sensation is one of shuddering intensity. Suppose she were really drowning? No, the boat spins along most smoothly. Francescone and Sergentin row rhythmically, the others are singing.

And flying white clouds, very white, are reflected in the stream; and they sail on and on, clouds in the sky, and clouds in the water, boats, laughter, and songs, who can stop them?

Blessed be the solid earth, with the foundations of houses, with the roots of trees, with the solidity

of rocks, with the safety of lovely lanes straight through the green and the blue, like ribbons of sunshine.

Towards the end of an April of deluging rains, lo! the Adda overflows and devastates banks, houses, and fields. Terrible is the Adda, when it rises. One day when the flood is highest, the workers are sent back to their homes from the factory in danger. What a surprise, what joy for Dinin when she comes from school, to find her mother on the threshold, smiling at her!

They both feel like two school children on a vacation. Which of them is the younger? And they go out, in spite of the downpour, as far as the bridge, to see the show, like gentlefolks at the theatre.

A great crowd, a slow, dark, interminable procession of people who talk under their breath, with gestures of sadness and of terror, and yet in their eyes there is revealed the unconscious, sadistic satisfaction that is always given, that is given to all, by the shuddering excitement of disaster.

The river is within a few feet of the parapet. The granite piers are submerged to the height of the arches.

The bridge is long, with centuries of solidity, with a look of eternity which belongs not so much to structures erected by the hand of man as to the elemental foundations of Nature.

But it seems just now to rock like Francescone's boat, insecure under one's steps, suspended miraculously in the murky air between the sorrow of heaven and the anger of the river.

The river?

There is no more river. It has devoured its banks, inundated the streets, the meadows, the woods, the stables, and the farms as far as the eye can reach. Water and only water. The flood, of a turbid, earthy color, overflows from infinite space to run over into infinity, carrying away, in walls of solid, yellowish foam, bits of household goods, empty cradles (where is the baby?), tiles, rags, and carcasses.

And what a booming! That dull booming, near

and far, that is not only from the water! Rather from the land, suffocated by the enemy that crushes and submerges it.

Obscure passages from the Old Testament, heard in school, come back to the girl's mind: "And in the beginning was chaos. Afterwards the Lord divided the waters from the waters."

Is chaos about to return?

Her innate terror of the water begins to make her anxious. The feeling of drowning clutches at her heart, clouds her vision, almost makes her reel. Always, in the most serious moments of her life, that feeling will seize upon her, with a vision of the Adda in flood.

She would like to say to her mother: "Let's go, mother; let's go back home," when her mother, as if coming out of a dream, murmurs thoughtfully, gazing at the emptiness:

"Do you know—I ought to tell you something. Just one thing. After all, you are no longer a child, and then, I have always talked to you as to a woman. The other day I said 'No' to Giusto Fer-

ragni, the chief dyer, who wanted to marry me. He has tormented me for so long! Just imagine! He wanted to marry me!"

The girl gazes at the little woman beside her with profound astonishment, and she no longer seems to be her mother. Simply a woman. She sees her as she is, no longer young, not yet old. Perhaps she has always been the same age. Her shawl hides her figure, her scarf covers her hair. The grey locks can't be seen. Her uncovered forehead shows power, her eyes look straight at you from under the broad arch of the eyebrows. There is a potent vitality in that face of strong shadows, with the plainly marked lines. And in every muscle that flash of internal vigor, and that laugh, the laughter of eyes and of teeth!

A woman who may still love and be loved.

For the first time she appears to her child under this aspect; and she feels still more that she loves her. She has a touching reverence for her, a tender fear of her.

Ferragni: Oh, yes. The new head dyer who came

from Torre Pellice. He, too, is rather old; big, rugged, short but steady on his legs, a mastiff, of a good breed. Now the young girl recalls her mother's occasional recent restless, sleepless nights, in their bed together. For some time she has been pining and nervous, a trifle is the cause of complaint, grave symptoms in a nature like hers. The girl also remembered going to meet her one evening and having seen her climbing the lane by his side. They were talking to each other, and they seemed to her, who knows why, to be far away from all the other people about.

So love is not only for the young? And how is love born?—And how does it end?—And what is it?—The love of Nani for Daria, the love of her mother for Giusto Ferragni? Some of her companions at school tell her secrets about love that do not please her because they disturb her, while in a book it is another thing. In a book there is the seductive music of the printed page, which transports her soul.

"Mother, why did you say no?"

"Because I can't give you a stepfather, daughter. It is very true that we should no longer be poor. Ferragni is well-off, and I think he may own land in the east, over there in his countryside. But he has such a bad temper. He admits it himself. And then, you will understand, how would things have gone with you? Grief on grief, perhaps. A real mother never, for any reason in the world, gives a stepfather to her children."

"But for you? You might rest—live better—"

Silence. Rain. Is it the river rising or the heavens descending? They are almost mingling.

"It does not matter," replies Vittoria, shivering with cold and wrapping her shawl closely about her: "It does not matter. Besides, Ferragni has already asked for and determined upon another situation in his own part of the country. He will leave soon, in a few weeks. Oh, you know, child, men—they are quickly consoled. Up there he will find someone else, if he really has a strong wish to marry. Let us stay together, I and you, Dinin. You and I, always, always—"

Silence. Dinin would like, indeed ought, to tell her that perhaps she has not done wisely, that love is too great a treasure to be rejected. But what does she know about love, and about motherhood? If her mother has decided so, it is perhaps because her nature reacts better to such a decision. The words struck her on her mother's lips: "My children."

Children? No, mother, just myself.

You think less of the other one, perhaps because you have not had to wear yourself out for him. But you are not conscious of this, and you think that you love him as well as you love me, poor mother! And it is for me, for me alone, that you said no to Ferragni. All of your sacrifices, all your caresses, all your pride for me. But shall I return to you as much as you give me? And if tomorrow, on my way, if I also should find a love that carried me away as it does so many, where should I leave you, mother? And what would you do? Have you not perhaps given me too much of yourself, mother?

She thinks, but she does not speak.

There are voices that echo in the heart, vague, confused, like the roar of the Adda at flood. And her heart aches under the weight of a responsibility that, before, she had not felt so cruelly. They are still there, mother and daughter, and for life, bound about with the tie of blood that unites the newly born with the maternal substance. So frail, so ephemeral! It is sundown. The lowering sky, mud-colored, seems as if it wanted to crush them. Under their feet the bridge seems as if it would be engulfed from moment to moment. The mother leans against the shoulder of her daughter, who is already taller than she. And the river rises and rises so as to hide the land, and in the young girl's mind, drowning every other thought, the passages from the Old Testament: "In the beginning was chaos. Afterwards the Lord divided the waters from the waters."

She has not been herself for some time; slack in her studies, indifferent about everything, dull

in understanding and slower in retaining; sallow and with eyes so sunken that they look like scars.

She wakes, startled, in the middle of the night, because of terrifying dreams of wells in which she is drowning, and of falling walls under which she is suffocating. Food disgusts her, sometimes with intolerable nausea.

Her mother, calm and without false modesty, says to her:

"It's nothing! You are as sound as a bell. You are approaching womanhood. One of these days, perhaps in a few months, you will see. Don't be worried. You know what it is."

Yes, she thinks that she knows. She has talked about it with other girls, she has caught a glimpse of it behind skilfully veiled sentences in certain pages of her novels. But as the cruelty of the physical revelation comes upon her personally, the truth overwhelms her.

She is alone at home. May breathes through the little open balcony, silently, deliriously, with

tremulous shadows of green, warmth of the sun, perfume of acacias, and musical murmurings of amorous bees. She would like forever to hear the humming of the bees in a green silence. She holds a collection of poetry on her lap, open at a page of immortal verses. She ought to commit them to memory for her next lesson in Italian, but she cannot succeed in doing it.

The verses will not stay fixed in her brain. They seem to stay hovering in the air, by enchantment, confused with the warmth of the sun, the perfume of the acacias, the happy buzzing of the bees. She imagines a beautiful thing that smiles upon her. No poet has written these verses. They sprang into being miraculously of themselves, in the souls and on the lips of mankind, on a morning in May. They are like the air, they are an element, one can sink oneself in them.

And lo, she really feels herself engulfed by deep waters.

How many minutes does she stay so, forsaken in her chair, unconscious? She does not know. Hav-

ing come to her senses, she realizes, with a terror that reason has no power to control, that she is changed. . . . She slips away to her own room and throws herself on the bed, a broken creature. . . . Why cannot she be neither woman nor man, but just a spirit?

Little by little her sobs die away and, exhausted, the poor child sleeps. And only in slumber can she escape from herself.

The Street of the Orphans, a beggar in its loneliness, old and poor, rocky, with a narrow sidewalk on only one side. On the other side there is nothing but a low wall, protecting wide-spreading gardens. The Street of the Orphans—crowded with convents, and with silent private dwellings just like convents. When the sun beats upon it, whoever is passing sees his own shadow too clearly, in that empty silence, and is disturbed by it. Songs and chattering of birds come from the hidden gardens, sounds of monastery bells, tremulous with humility and clear as innocence, rise

from the courtyards and from the oratories within.

For Dinin the Street of the Orphans is often transformed into a cemetery road, flanked by mortuary chapels, guarded at their thresholds by an invisible angel.

She calls it to herself the "Street of the Dead," but she is not afraid. From the time when she saw her grandmother on her bed of peace, the dead are for her more calm and more kind than the living.

At its end it forms an angle with a dirty, dark lane. She calls it "the thief" because it seems to her like a thief in ambush. Exactly on that corner stands her uncle the schoolmaster's house.

Dinin has never been able to bear the peculiar odor of that house. The mingled smell of ink and of mustiness, of rotten heaps of bones, of old rags, and of old frying gone bad; something between a cheap boarding-house and a charity school.

And yet, her uncle is an educated man, and has a certain air of authority in his dry way of speaking, in his small, erect body, in his long, sharp

nose. And her aunt looks like a consumptive abbess, always pinched into a black dress that time has worn shiny and greenish, with dangling earrings of mosaic, representing two broken columns, and a mosaic brooch representing the Pantheon.

Under the weight of the truncated columns and of the Pantheon, it seems as if she would collapse, with her waxen face, her waxen hands, her bent back, her mouth bitter but resigned, that of one who never in her life got anything but injustice from fate, and who always hoped in vain.

How ever did things go so wrong? The characteristic odor of the house that the little aristocrat cannot breathe without nausea is an odor of moral disorder and of ruin.

The two narrow dormitories of the boarding pupils are now empty. Their windows open into a kitchen-garden where only kidney beans, late pumpkins, sickly plums, and weeds struggle to keep alive. The mattresses show the straw protruding from their extensive rents and a blackish and rather greasy streak has been left in the bot-

tom of the small basins. The dining-room is closed. In the kitchen, stews of a doubtful flavor are eaten. They recall the tallow with which her aunt smears the smooth bands of her hair, still miraculously black at a good fifty-five years of age.

Melancholy talk, while the dubious food is swallowed.

And yet my uncle had succeeded in getting a goodly community of eighteen or twenty boys together, sons of the proprietors of small country estates, to prepare them for public schools. But the vice of drunkenness has undermined his character, irritated his nerves, and weakened his brain. There are rumors, too, of an incurable disease of the spinal cord, but these things are not talked about, and are not known.

One by one, the boarders are taken away by their families, and he drowns his humiliation and his last pennies in small glasses of liquor, slapping his wife in the face once in a while (he needs some outlet!), she being ever more resigned even to blows; and growling about Nani, who, instead of

studying, plays the petty politician in the "Whip," scribbles revolutionary articles in the "Voice of the Adda," and, through bad example, also begins to drink.

"Laziness and treachery! I ought to have left you where you were!"

Nani answers with his most ashy pallor and with a shrug of his shoulders and goes off whistling. Only Pedrotto remains tied to my aunt's apron strings, a boy of eleven, with an ugly face, of which only the large ears like handles and the appealing dog's eyes are noticeable. He is motherless, his father has married again and, simply to get rid of the boy, consents to pay the monthly fee, without caring about anything else.

My aunt cannot live without Pedrotto. She has even put his bed in her room so that she shall not be left alone.

But one day the master is carried on a shutter to the house at the corner of the Street of the Orphans. They picked him up on the main street, with his shoulder and his jaw fractured by a

train. It is not known whether he fell or whether he threw himself under the rails, wishing to die. The train did not kill him suddenly but brought about his end.

There is nothing to lament. Some deaths have the inevitable necessity of the hour of doom. The man was already done for. It was well that he should die.

On his pillow, his head bandaged with bloody gauze, he lies most quietly, with his long, straight, sharp nose in the middle of his face, thrust forward as if giving an order or hurling a reproach even at the point of death. Weep! Why weep? What is happening is the logical thing. And yet his wife is weeping, because she is left alone in the world, without anyone at all even to slap her face and to make her suffer.

After the funeral, even Pedrotto goes away.

In the house, gradually despoiled of its household goods, sold one by one, and which reeks of mould and of drains, of rubbish and of back-slap, the old lady drags herself about, nerveless, useless,

without hope, without good-will, her only occupation being certain complicated work in hair on satin, on little pieces of pasteboard, on wire-netting, that all smells of decay.

At last she vanishes.

Who has seen her die?

Perhaps she is not dead but has just faded away.

There are creatures who disappear like this, like certain trees in the mist, when the twilight of November falls.

One morning, half an hour before school time, her mother having already left a while before for the factory, Nani said to Dinin:

"I'm just here for a minute, then I must run. Do you know, today I am going to Daria, to Ignazia's house. We shall be married as soon as possible. Ignazia is pleased; she has to be. Seventeen and fifteen years old we are. It's enough to make you die of laughing. Two big children, but Daria is going to have a baby. Tell mother tonight, when she comes back from the factory. She

can't refuse her permission. I know that she is thinking of putting a cot for me here in the kitchen, now that the new tenants are about to take possession of my uncle's house. But here—it's useless to talk about it. I was not here as a baby and I won't stay here as a man. It's all up with school. Who will pay for the books now?"

Dinin's head was dizzy. The furniture and the walls danced about her.

"But you need only one more year to finish your course. Are you going to let Ignazia support you? You'll have to earn your living."

"Vir sum. I've already looked for something and found it. Giraldi, the engineer, will take me as office boy, beginning next month. Two lire a day —not enough to squander. Daria is working as a dressmaker. Then will come the baby, and we shall see what we shall see."

A baby! Child of two children, a real live baby who cries and wants milk, who grows and will have to be brought up, as if he had a father and a mother in earnest.

"What have you done, Nani? Didn't you think?"

"Of what? You are a darling—you are. It's enough to make me die of laughing. You don't understand anything. You are Dinin, who learns all her lessons and believes that it's living to save all your money to the last red cent. You are a picture on the wall. But you are rottenly wrong. Life is quite another thing, quite a different thing, Dinin."

A big push, a kiss, more with his teeth than with his lips, a pirouette, a burst of derisive laughter between "So that's that" and "I don't care a button," and away he dashed.

She remains, to collect the books for her lessons, with a confused and heavy head. A great difference between "So that's that" and "I don't care a butmight she then have a lover, have a child? Her thin and slender body has not a tremor at such an idea, nor has her spirit a shadow, only a cold dismay, a desire to withdraw herself, to make herself free. It is Nani who is wrong his is the life of the

weak and the blind, carried on in a brawl, eaten alive by passion.

She does not care for it. It frightens her. She prefers pure water drunk after a soup of rice and milk, good restoring sleep after study and quiet labor, the poor house accounts closed without a penny owed, the order that is peace, the solitude that is independence. A man in her life? But no youth as yet has turned to look back at her on the street. Better, better so! She understands well now why her mother preferred her to her first-born, and puts all her hopes in her.

But, at night, after having sat up for a long time with the poor woman, in the cold kitchen and in the uneasy bed, sighing, and discussing the sad news, she falls asleep in a way that is not usual to her, a troubled, broken sleep.

And towards dawn she has a dream.

She has a baby by her side, in a cradle, naked and wailing. She knows that it is her own. How did she get it? From whom?—and when? She remembers nothing. In her body she feels herself

pure and sealed, an unripe fruit. And yet the child is there, lamenting, doubling his little fists, and he is her master. She will not be able, she ought not to do anything but rock him, feed him, serve him, bring him up. An earnest appeal, full of sorrow, vibrates in that infant's cry that cuts the shadows and pierces the walls.

"I did not want to come into the world," he seems to complain—"see how helpless I am. It is you who called me, and now, now what is to be done?"

To calm him, she takes him in her arms. But she does not know how to hold a new-born baby. Its limbs seem like glass, they almost give her a cold chill. She is afraid of letting him fall, lest he should break on the ground. Nothing in the little creature appeals to her. And he cries and cries, but his disconsolate howling changes into the light, sardonic, derisive laughter of Nani:

"Oh—it makes one die of laughter! Life is like this, like this, Dinin!"

She gets up late and ill, hardly in time to run

to school, with her very bones bruised by the villainous dream. Her mother's place in bed is empty. At five o'clock, on foot, very softly so as not to disturb Dinin, she left for the factory. She had wept all night and could not doze even for a minute, and she had not the strength to get up so early, and yet she had to, but there is no trouble that can allow us to stop working.

Frugal days, without change, little by little growing from spring to summer, the mother at her usual hard toil, the daughter at her usual studies.

To the songs of Vittoria, the artisan, breathed out when the looms rested, down at the factory, there answered from the small rooms over the palace gardens on Via Roma the songs of Homer. The girl at last is steeped, body and soul, in Poetry. From her infancy she devoured many printed pages, but that was not Poetry. She learned many pages of verse at school, but still she did not feel them as Poetry.

Now she sees, now she understands, and everything is transfigured.

The azure winds of the Odyssey, bearing out of space echoes of heroic choirs; the beauty of Helen, the only woman in the world between men and death; the rushing, nocturnal cavalcade of the hendecasyllables of the "Sepolcri," and above all the unshaken and prodigious serenity of Leopardi, kept her in that condition of enchantment, of joyful pleasure that was first revealed to her when she listened to the passing of time across the invisible and the inexpressible.

How rich she is! Much more so than the lady who had one day said to her: "You have stolen—" much more so than her daughters who are learning to play on the piano and to speak foreign languages, who go to "balli bianchi," who have dresses sent them from the principal dressmakers of Turin, and who bow to her rather distantly and looking down upon her a little. And yet, they are kind. She herself is not kind, but instead as proud as Lucifer, because she is so rich.

She possesses rhythm and learning, measure and tone, and thronging visions.

She knows that she will own them forever. Now that she has discovered the secret of joy, she is prodigal of it. When, at twilight, she goes to wait for her mother by the factory, the cadenced roar of the transmission that almost shakes the air about her translates itself for her into lofty sounding eleven and seven-syllabled verse.

The only man in the Normal School whom she can really think of as Master is the professor of Italian, and he really seems to her a high priest in the one special hour of the week, which is called by the scholars the "Dante hour."

He is sixty years old, rugged and vigorous. When very young he left his native Trieste in Lombardy, from hatred of Austria and because of a passionate love of liberty. His name is Paolo Tedeschi. He was in one of the religious orders, and he renounced the priesthood to take a wife. Sometimes rough, of pugnacious honesty, never unjust. He had the face of an ancient leader, out-

lined on stone with blows of an axe, crabbed and gnarled. He had the shoulders of a wrestler and most beautiful bishop's hands. He taught with ardor, with vehement slowness, and while he is teaching he always seems to be studying and learning himself. But in the "Dante hour" he does nothing but read, and he reads as if he were praying.

But as long as she shall have life, the daughter of Vittoria will remember that voice and those readings. It is a voice rich in deep tones, which does not slur a syllable, does not mistake an emphasis, but rises, climbs, penetrates, reveals hidden treasures by a pause or by a vibrant tone, and succeeds in seeming a bodily part of the verse.

Can the human voice do so much? The cantos of Dante are offered thus to the girl, nor could they be better given; without comments, unadorned, with the most vivid and pure interpretation. Whatever her mind does not comprehend is made clear to her by the music. She is often overwhelmed by the sweetness of mystical ecstasy. Poetry, thus intoned with a full orchestra, acts

upon her as did the times of celestial visions upon the saints, who used to fall in ravishment before them. My master notices it, is astonished at it, watches it, without showing it, prefers her to the others.

One day, face to face in the deserted class-room (its air still radiant with the canto about the divine forest, dense and green) he says to her, stroking her chestnut hair and her thin shoulders in a fatherly way:

"How pale you are! Does poetry hurt you so much? If it gives you so much pain it means that you love it too much. There is so much sensitiveness in your make-up. You will suffer, you will suffer, my child."

My master is joking, no doubt. To her who takes delight in the feeling of freedom, it seems as if he were uttering a blasphemy. Suffer? She will never renounce the suffering that is love and superabundance of life. Moreover, she asks herself, whether, at a certain degree of intensity, suffering and joy may not be the same thing.

Impressions of color and of form! She does not like to visit her fellow-students in their homes. To only one of them can she go, without constraint, to study in her company and she does not know why. Not because of her friend, a large girl as good as good bread, who has grown too quickly, who is sixteen and looks like nineteen, and who is ten as to her mind. She is rather pretty; a flower, but without much perfume.

She goes to see her because her home pleases her.

A little old mansion that was once a convent. Vaulted ceilings, freshly whitewashed, with black carved furniture, and pictures of sacred subjects, rather black themselves too. What peace! There is one room with its walls frescoed with scenes from the Old Testament and there is nothing in it but an enormous figure of Christ in wood, two chests in the form of a bench, and a prie-dieu.

In the little courtyard where they study in pleasant weather, she would like to spend her whole life. It is small, but it seems large, enclosed

to the height of the first story by a gallery in terra-cotta; in the middle, a well, green with moss; grass around the well; four glossy laurels in the corners, and, surrounding it, a small portico of airy lightness.

Black and white, and long ago the young nuns used to pass in file, praying, behind the pillars.

The sunlight takes on a richer color there, perhaps because of the terra-cotta, which is of such a lovely red, and at sunset it lights up like fire.

Between these arches, that moulding, glowing blood-red, those four laurels and the young girl hold conferences, whose words are lines, lights, shadows, reflections.

There is one time of day in which, if the sky is clear, the sun, slantwise, reaches the entablature of a window framed by a climbing jasmine. That moment of the day has for her the quality of perfection.

She would like to arrest it, to shut it within herself.

And only when her life shall have become ma-

ture, will she be able to explain to herself the reason for an action that left her for a long time doubtful and disturbed; the retreat of her flower-like companion to a closed convent, because of an irresistible vocation.

The causes of this sweet mystical disease were rooted in that house, the ex-monastery; in those rooms peopled by saints at prayer; in that courtyard of ecstatic monastical beauty. These things, little by little, imprinted on the childish mind a certainty that could never be effaced.

Where art thou, Sister Innocenza?

You have closed that period of my days.

It is torrid July. My mother has fallen ill. With a calm face she must do a courageous thing, take her to the hospital.

The malady (bronchial pneumonia) is not very serious, but it makes one think of possible consequences and it demands care and rest.

What a wrench, to leave one's mother lying in that bed in a row with so many others, and to

have to go away and to sleep alone at night without the comfort of our long whispered talks, in the dark, in the warmth of the shared coverings.

Every Thursday and every Sunday, from ten until midday, Dinin is at the invalid's bedside, in the street of Santa Caterina. But, this is the truth, if it were not for seeing her mother with that difficulty of breathing, that heavy little cough, those cheeks that seem like burning coals, she would have thought the hospital most delightful.

Everything is friendly in there, the shining freshness of the corridors, the perfect whiteness of the walls and of the beds, the windows that look like bits of sky, and that mingled odor of disinfectants and of barley broth, and those little nuns in winged caps and felt shoes, as silent as mercy, and those sturdy nurses with their white handkerchiefs crossed over their blue-and-white checked dresses.

There is the rhythm of order there, even in the

patients. They look as if they were resting rather than suffering.

There is beauty there, calm and full of serenity.

From the feverish but peaceful lips of Vittoria (watchful of everything about her and curious about life in spite of her illness) her daughter learns of the misfortunes and the adventures of all the sick in the ward.

She chats with those who are least ill, with the convalescents and with the humble relatives who come to her. These common people seem to have known her a long time; perhaps she has held them in her heart and did not know it. She says comforting words. She receives comfort, simply.

For the first time, through the pain of her mother, the sorrow of others has come into her life. She looks at it with eyes that seem already experienced. She goes to meet it with a steadfast heart. She feels, still gropingly, that it is an unequalled element of strength and of fruitfulness and that to reject it from fear or through egoism, would mean to impoverish oneself.

If they would leave her there in the hospital, it would be just to work and to comfort the sick, as long as her mother had to stay there! How joyful she would be! Leaving there at about noon (with a catch in her throat, with tears that she would not like to have seen and that she brushed from her eyes into her heart) she can hardly decide to go back to the little room where no one is awaiting her.

She can go where she will, wander around the city until evening, until night.

Shall she go to some friend's, some schoolmate's? She is shy and proud. She will not go without an invitation, and then, it is in vacation, the pretext of studying together can't be alleged.

Shall she go to her brother's, who is rarely seen by his poor, sick mother, simply because, he says, the hospital nauseates him.

But has her brother a home? No, the house belongs to fat Ignazia. In the back shop, encumbered with vegetables and spoiled fruit, she would hear the complaints of the two women against Nani,

who spends his evenings in the public house, is getting tipsy again, and for good reason has jealous rows with his wife, and does not give up a cent.

That little, pregnant wife of her own age distresses her. She would like to ask her so many things about her coming maternity, but it seems to her that the child does not know enough to become a mother before long. In her heart Daria is repugnant to her. How beautiful it is, if the only deformity is of her condition. She feels her to be of another race, the race of women happy in their sensuality, who make men turn round in the street and attract them by the breath of their perfume. She knows that quarreling does not prevent Daria, between one storm and the next, from going with her young husband to the usual balls in the usual society, imperilling her own hopes, exposing herself to the imminent danger of a miscarriage.

Some say that she does it on purpose.

Never, therefore, the house of Ignazia for Dinin.

Where shall she go? And eat? No matter, a bit

of bread and some fruit can easily be swallowed on the street.

The street is lovely, especially when you are alone there.

In that solitude of whose freedom she instinctively makes such innocent use, there is a sadness which does not escape her and by which she feels herself privileged.

The little square opposite the hospital has few passers-by; houses closed, blinds closed, grass between the stones, yellowish and scorched by the sun. There are a few benches on which to sit and dream.

You would say that the silence comes from the things themselves and that the rare voices of men cannot disturb it. The fourteenth century façade of the church of San Francesco, withdrawn in bare austerity, closes in the little square with the very sign of God.

The girl enters the church, bows her head, touches her forehead with her fingers dipped in the holy water, sits on a bench in the corner.

It is for refuge.

The ascetic, perfumed clouds of the incense, its breath rising towards the heights of the gothic naves, the saints in ecstasy on the windows, the Giottesque Virgins holding out the Christ-child from the columns, are as many transfigurations of her soul. Here she feels the words "forever" and "never" terribly alive in the air and in the stone, and she would like to compress their meaning within the limits of thought stretched even to excessive pain, but it is not possible.

And she prays. Not with humility; she is not humble. Whoever lives alone is never humble. She does not beg: "God help me," because she accepts her own suffering as life, and does not think that she has need of help. More than petition, here is communion. She is speaking, as it were, face to face with the supreme powers, to which she can give no actuality, but in which she believes. The spiritual circle that surrounds her is absolute, like the symbol of God on the façade of the church of San Francesco.

She often goes to visit another place of meditation and of beauty, by a way outside the city, very straight, between rows of plane trees and calm expanse of meadows. The cemetery.

There sleep her ancient uncles, her grandmother, not her father, who rests in the Gentilino of Milan, and a short time ago there came also to dwell here the rich lady who, one morning now already long ago, would not let her touch the lilies in the flowerbeds, as if her hand might be sacrilegious. Death, at first, had made her so slender and beautiful that she seemed a sleeping saint, now she is quiet under the ground and no sign of denial nor of command, neither with hand nor voice, can avail her any more.

But the young girl does not go to the cemetery for death, she goes for life.

Nor does she realize it. She is obeying the power of instinct. When she is in the enclosure of gravestones and of crosses, she feels as if she were reborn there and lived in completeness. Every epitaph standing out in black or golden letters on

the marbles sunk in green tells her a story. And the grass is thicker, fuller of sap, than in any other garden. There are more climbing roses formally trained about the tombs, more massive festoons of ivy, with a heavy rustiness at their roots, with a metallic lustre towards their tops, closely twining round the stones spotted with mould. She loves the common flowers, dahlias, asters, wall-flowers, cinerarias, geraniums, growing mixed together and mingling with nameless herbs at the feet of the humble crosses. She loves the pink and white stars of the thistles and their earthy smell, and the votive candles, silent prayers. The glints of emerald of the lizard give her thrills of joy and seem to her like words in the silence. And those hummings of blue-winged creatures are to her ear the music of dreams, and that mingled odor of faded flowers, of phosphorescence, of matter in transmutation, that makes her first happy, then wavering as she walks, and heavy in her head like a drunkard.

She does not pray. She enjoys. Unwinking eyes

look kindly upon her. She is not living among the dead, but she is alive among the living, in a space of unrestricted liberty where no one disturbs her, no one expects anything of her, and she is sufficient to herself with an elemental spontaneity.

Her need for solitary wandering is calmed here, she would not be wise to go further; here are the tombs and the infinite, and in it she reposes.

Her mother knows many stories. True stories, about families connected with the nobility, friends or relatives of the noble house in which she was born and where she lived until past thirty. Stories seen with her own eyes, or heard from the lips of the servants, or breathed in from the air, like legends.

Her voice as she tells them (she has come back from the hospital and it is agreed that we make a delight of these few days of convalescence), her voice is the same, fresh with unchanging youth, the same that ten years before, down in the porter's lodge, used to read tales of romantic adven-

ture to the grandmother, while the little child, from inside, in bed, propped up on her elbows, with her eyes wide open, listening at every pore, was filling the shadows of the neighboring room with her own absorbed attention.

But among them all there is one that the child, grown a woman, loves the best, that she would like to hear over and over again, so as to feel the same icy shivers run down her back, that then she tells over to herself, absorbing herself with keen avidity in the human problems around which it is woven, so that she may suffer and enjoy more intensely. It was the story of the Lady Augusta.

* * * * * *

In this story there is hidden the lamentation that arises from the primal mystery of living, and from another mystery, that of death, a double lamentation that asks no aid but seeks only to liberate the suffering flesh. In her own hours of anguish the daughter of Vittoria will again find such lamentation in her heart and upon her own lips.

With her life, her mother also gave her that power of suffering. She planted it in the very roots of her soul.

Alas, and alas, and alas for herself and for others, for her own suffering and for all the suffering of humanity, born from supreme anguish but also from supreme love.

Stories of love, yes, stories of unconquerable love, Vittoria, the factory hand, calmly relates to her daughter, thoughtful and oppressed by her own sixteen years of life. The fear that they might harm her daughter does not seem to occur to her. For her, Dinin is always the wonder child who one day repeated to her from beginning to end the adventures of the "Woman Who Sold Bread," heard, while she pretended to be asleep, from herself by word of mouth, who, later, studied with eager joy the stories of France in the knightly romances of Alexandre Dumas the elder, who read the whole of Zola without having been hurt by it. The brain of her daughter is, for her, clearly apart

from weak and frail flesh. Her daughter ought to hear everything, to see everything, to know everything. Some day, perhaps, she will do great things (so the mother liked to think), that daughter who is not like other girls.

And she goes on telling stories.

She tells them well, with the pauses and light and shade of unconscious knowledge, engraving the pictures from memory with a few essential strokes, suddenly illuminating certain scenes with most vivid instantaneous light, quickly sketching in general scenes, guided by an artistic instinct that she does not know that she possesses, and that will die with her unrecognized.

And as she frequently repeats her narratives, and each time with a new brilliancy and rarity of ideas, the countries and the creatures evoked by her are imprinted on the thoughts of the girl, as well as in her memory, like places where she may have lived a long time, like relatives, every wrinkle on whose faces she knows, every habit of their minds.

Did she not hear a hundred times the empty laughter of Lady Emanuela, the patrician, all curls and caprices, who changed lovers a hundred times and never loved any one of them? She had a queer refrain which she tacked onto every remark, arranging her expression and saying with a flute-like note: "Stupendous, stu-u-p!" No one in the world ever had such little feet. From her crazy peregrinations through Italy and foreign countries, she would sometimes, like a migrating swallow from a window-sill, fall upon the home of her husband who was separated from her, there to embrace her children with sudden, stormy maternal passion, while her husband, with the face of a man condemned to death, locked himself into his own study, so as not to strangle her. Then, humming a tune, she would disappear again. Could the child not see her dying suddenly of heart failure, during an official supper at Naples, just when she was raising a goblet of champagne towards the flame of a chandelier, inviting her latest lover to look at himself in it? The guests,

half seas over, sprinkled champagne on the dying woman's face, streaked with rouge, her scarlet lips through their paint calling childishly for "coffee" before they stiffened forever.

Did she not live in intimate communion with Miss Vivian Hall, the English friend of the Lombard nobleman who in heroic times sacrificed his goods, his liberty, and his health for his country? Miss Vivian Hall, still almost a child as compared to him, careless, immature, with the long legs of her race, light straw-colored hair that, braided on her head, seemed thin and, when unbound, entirely covered her, and expressionless eyes, two bits of sky washed by the rain.

And peep, peep, a young sparrow, happy to be living in an ancient villa with a coat of arms on the court gate, and to have at her feet an Italian gentleman, and also to manage a poultry yard, a rabbit-warren, a stable, ten dogs, and a fish-pond, clambering half the day up into the fruit trees with those long dangerous legs, always in motion, pounding the piano with the same ardor

that she put into rushing about on wild horseback rides.

There is a way, such an endearing way, of mangling the name of her friend in her foreign way of speaking: "Chis-too-fo—Chis-too-fo—" that Don Cristoforo was fascinated by it, and in that slender, rather fair, greyhound-bitch he deceived himself into thinking that he possessed the world.

But it was not true that he possessed her, because no one of us can be absolute master of another. And one fine day the odd Englishwoman disappeared, and she was no more seen darting through the park and climbing the trees, astride a tree trunk calling childishly, "Chis-too-fo!"

Living stories, human stories, with the unequalled charm of truth. Aladdin's Lamp, Cinderella, the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood have no more vivid interest for the daughter of Vittoria, who in her heart does not care for the unlikelihood of mere idle stories. But if among them all the

most exciting is that about the Lady Augusta, the sweetest to listen to is the tale of the Lady Teodosia.

The Story of Lady Teodosia.

Lady Teodosia is still living, she is the same age as Vittoria. She used to live happily near Vittoria in the villa of Robecco on the Oglio and in the palace of Lodi. Now she is married to a great nobleman, in a city of southern Italy, the mother of strong sons, a lady of great piety. Swallowed up in distance, she has surely forgotten the humble companion of her childhood and of her early youth, but when the factory-hand speaks of her, it is with the most tender feeling of longing, as she might remember a lost sister.

What a flower was Lady Teodosia at sixteen!—A dark flower.

Barely back from boarding-school, compressed into one of those nun-like dresses that were the fashion then, little white collar, close-fitting waist,

petticoat over a hoop-skirt—with that profile of clear amber, like a cameo, shaded by heavy eyelashes and by two clusters of thick curls of a black that yet gleamed with light. Seeing her on the street there was not a creature who did not turn to look, dazzled by her beauty, and she used to ask whoever was walking with her, softly, with a gentle voice:

"Everybody looks at me. Am I pretty?"

Her little feet hardly touched the earth and could never have been hurt by the stones. Living, but in mid-air, held there by a dream, and she was much less alive than the whirlwind of a god-daughter of Giuditta Grisi whom she called Vittoria the Earthquake.

She was timid but her friend took the lead.

"There's nothing to be afraid of with me!"

And what running and laughing and chattering and deriding of half the world, and innocent flirtations behind the park railings with the country youths! Then, the simple dances on the barn floor and in the meadows (Lady Teodosia was not at

all proud); the tricks played on the good curate, and in order to be forgiven, the paper flowers and embroidered altar-cloths for the church, and sleepless nights passed in the garden, close to each other, body and soul under the spell of the moonlight and of youth, intoxicated with itself!

Then the war of '59, Solferino, San Martino. The ambulances. The stately town transformed into a field hospital, with doctors, nurses, and operating rooms. Dressing-rooms turned into workrooms for bandages and lint; drawing-rooms, corridors without end, changed into wards for the wounded.

The ambulances. How many! Very slowly, at quite a distance apart, with no order, under the raging sun of the dog-days, or under stormy rains, they came with their burden of suffering. Those Frenchmen, that a little while ago had been seen leaving for the war, proud, brilliant, point-device, some of them carrying besides their guns a little tame bird, a kitten, a puppy on one shoulder; these Piedmontese, hard-shelled, hairy of face and

full of daring, were coming back in the wagons (when they came back at all), wailing like children who are crying for their mothers, with limbs amputated and dressed as well as might be on the field, here one without an arm, another without a leg, another without eyes; with bandages pitiably stuck to the encrusted and stinking pus of the wounds; with throats parched with thirst, with veins empty from hemorrhage, or burned with fever.

"Lady Teodosia! Quick! They are arriving! Let's run! They are here!"

Shoving aside the curtains heavy with dust, that wagon that revealed to the terrified young women a gigantic zouave, kinky-haired and black, bare from his waist to his knees, showing a horrible wound in his groin, through the displacements of the dressings.

Those two boys in one vehicle, with the sad entreating faces of boys in pain, who together had but two arms and two legs!

That French grenadier who no longer looked

like a man, and who twisted and turned in convulsions, shrieking and grinding his teeth.

"A boire! Oh de l'eau!—de l'eau—par pitié!"

Up and down through the improvised passages, with broth, cordials, medicines, disinfectants. The cameo-like profile of Lady Teodosia grew sharp from weariness and from pity, but all the more instant was her kindness. And the young hearts were right, indeed, to beat under their wounds. Long looks of convalescents, full of words that they dare not speak! The young countess passes, smiles, shows gentle kindness for all, always with her own look of one who is up above in a dream, who just touches with her silken shoes something that is not the hard world of sinners.

There are others who sigh after Vittoria the Earthquake, always good-humored, full of courage, ready for the most painful dressings as for the merriest talk; roguish eyes, light heart, contagious laugh, springing alive from one of Goldoni's comedies. "Italy, Italy," her lips cry with ardor. "Oh, Miss, if you would permit me to love you!" hearts

are thinking with emotion. And a few little notes, and a few claspings of hands, and a few forgetful promises, and the eternal illusions. But the convalescents stay only a short time in the villa-hospital. Look, they are going, they are gone, they will never come back.

Lady Teodosia has gone too, taking with her the season of flowers, time that will never return.

While the woman gives herself up to her story-telling, blissful over her own memories, and speaks more for herself than for the one who is listening to her, she does not notice that her daughter keeps looking attentively at her hands.

Very small hands, tapering, short in the joints, but of such expressive gestures that they depict the ideas aroused by her words, their whiteness is almost bluish, traversed by violet veins.

They live by themselves, and seem separate from her body, although joined to the wrists with aristocratic delicacy, and her arms carry on the daintiness of the hands with almost fragile lines.

Neither fatigue nor age has yet been able to spoil them. They smile of themselves, before the mouth smiles.

Silently, reverently, the young girl compares herself with her mother, and she discovers, reproduced in herself, with a more amber skin, fed by younger blood, the same delicacy of articulation, the same network of veins between blue and amethyst, on the surface of the forearms and of the wrists, as if both of us might have descended from a noble family, refined and perfected through the ages. For that reason alike too in our nervous resistance, in the quality of our wills, in the fundamental soundness of our constitutions. The swift motion and the smallness of our hands contrast with the massive brow and the squareness of the jaw.

What kind of a father had her mother?

She does not know. She never knew him.

What kind of a husband had her mother?

She does not know. She never knew him. She was a year old when he died.

Nor can she, though longing to, call him "father." If she asks her mother about him, she says, "Your husband."

Besides, her mother, although she chatters so willingly about things that are past, on this subject is almost speechless. She never tells about him alive and working, but only about how he died of typhoid, at the hospital, and of the miserable destitution in which he left her. And she ends her few words with a weary closing of the eyes and "Enough," that is clean cutting of the subject.

Certainly there is this in it: that my grandfather and also my father belonged to a genuine peasant family, that their ancestors and the ancestors of their ancestors were unpolished people of the plough and the hoe, the man who has nothing in common with small hands veined with violet.

Who, then, gave those hands to her mother and herself?

She knows.

Giuditta Grisi told her in the days when the

little portress used to lose herself in silent communion with the portrait of the singer.

Wonderful discoveries! Memories of travels and of the theatre, stages dazzling with light, ecstasy of the audience carried away by melody! The crowd used to seem one single man, and its enthusiasm used to be transmuted into magnificent madness. Smiles and gifts from queens and from kings. And love affairs. Loves as rapid as the action of operas, passionate as the gestures of the tenor who is murdering the prima donna.

No one has ever heard what Giuditta Grisi said to her. Not even my grandmother, bent over her stocking, murmuring over the beads of her rosary, who no longer remembers having been, long ago, the attendant of the singer; exposed with her to the chances of the streets and of inns, to the caprices of the green room, to the magnetism of the pit. Colorless but charming; and her slight limp probably gave her the grace of a Louise de la Vallière.

Romance? That may well be. For her romance

and reality are one and the same. What lives in her imagination seems to her to be a bit of real life.

She has an ancestor who was a great artist and a great nobleman. She does not know his name, she does not know his face. But that makes no difference. It pleases her to picture him to herself. Her mother and herself bear the intimate seal of his spirit, the visible signs of his personality. The curious contrasts that are conspicuous in Vittoria, the laboring woman, have their reason in him. That delicacy and that strength, that love of poetry and song, that making a work of art out of her life from the stuff of the humblest toil.

She also finds in him the logical cause of her own soul, of her own sensitiveness, of the riches within that sometimes oppress her. Was he an actor? Or was he only drawn to the theatre by passion? This one thing is sure that in the pit of a theatre (the few times, alas, when her mother could take her there with free tickets) she feels

herself in her own place, at home. And she knows that if it should be permitted to her to climb up to the stage one single time, just for fun, she would not stumble over a stair or at a door, she would not miss a step, she would recognize every side scene, every table, every back scene. Her lungs breathe in with joy that atmosphere laden with human breath, of mixed perfumes, of personal magnetism, of music, of lights. It seems to her as if she had always breathed it. And the ancient figures of the play. She recognizes them one by one, she has beheld them in body and in spirit, in birth she bore them with her, who knows from what depths?

Could she offend anyone by giving herself up to such an orgy of fantastic inferences?

After all, she cares for nothing and for no one, except for explaining herself to her own self.

The family?

What is the family?

Her mother, and herself.

One evening her mother comes home from the factory accompanied by Selma, the doorkeeper, and by the two faithful Vestri sisters. She drags herself along and an arm supports her.

A rusty iron hook has wounded her severely—the palm of her right hand.

At once we took her to a drug store for disinfection, and there she is dressed and bandaged with care, but now she feels ill, her teeth chatter with a nervous and feverish chill, and she has to go to bed.

But she cannot sleep.

The slight fever brings a cold sweat to her skin, and to her lips a medley of incoherent, muttered words. The excessive pain of the wound increases the rapid beating of her pulse, rising with ever increasing severity from her hand to her shoulder.

Her daughter watches over her. She helps her towards morning to renew the displaced bandages.

Oh, such a little hand and such a great wound!

An ominous hole, with swollen, jagged edges,

pierced almost from the palm to the back of the hand.

And if they should have to amputate the hand?

The infection spreads to the arm, which swells and aches. Days and nights of suffering pass, of fears, unspoken but heavy, leaden for the heart which hides them.

Up by the armpit a malignant abscess develops.

And if they should have to amputate the arm?

Fortunately these are groundless terrors, the usual fears of too great affection. Of such healthfulness is her thin body that, a few weeks later, every danger has passed, but her arm is always raised to her neck and her strength does not come back very quickly.

With her other arm she helps herself to do household work and she says: "This time, too, we've patched things up. Don't worry, daughter. Neither God nor the devil wants me."

And she hums:

"Ah, hardly had I time to see thee,
A little flower, faded so soon—"

She keeps two or three pots of red geraniums on the little balcony. What a boon for her to have time to tend them a little! She fondles them, she talks to them, she says everything for them, questions and answers.

She even succeeds in reciting, with the delicate emphasis that expresses them exactly, the sextains of Mea and Gosto del Guadagnoli, and those of Naso; and many simple couplets of Arnaldo Fusinato, from memory.

"Pestilence raging,
Sustenance lacking,
On the bridge flapping
The white flag of truce."

"Did I never tell you about it, Dinin? Just before you were born I did nothing but read the poetry of Arnaldo Fusinato. I used to carry the book with me into the workshop. In the rest hour all the seamstresses used to stand about to listen to me. So did you, unborn, I am sure of it. 'Giaello,' 'The Two Mothers,' 'Sister Estella.' The seamstresses wept. Especially for Sister Estella!

"Daily grew she pale and paler
Beside Count Ubaldo she sat her down."

In the meantime her hand does not heal. Twenty days my mother has stayed at home. Some debts were incurred. It is not possible to let them stand.

"Will you go to the factory, daughter, to ask for the payment of my daily wages? They owe it to me. I was injured at work. Who knows if they won't give you a few extra pence. It would be convenient, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, mother, I'll go."

Dinin exercises great self-control. It is as great as her pride. Climbing the steep way, one thought beats in her brain. She might now very well become a worker in the factory, like her mother, like the Vestri sisters. It would be enough if her mother should say to her:

"I cannot support you at school." And then the loom, the thirteen hours of weariness, the lint of the wool in her throat, dirty hands, the searching of her pockets, and no studying. Not to know, not to read, the Iliad and the Divine Comedy.

Just a sheep in the flock.

Would it be possible for her? No. She feels that in some way she would know how to free herself.

There is little smoke that day from the chimneys, an ashy scarf fluttering in curves. She rings at the porter's lodge: "Oh, there you are! And how is Vittoria?" Shown into the director's office, she begins to tremble foolishly. It seems to her as if she were there to ask charity.

A few minutes later, she cannot explain to herself how, she finds herself out again on the dusty way, with the factory behind her, with the clear certainty in her soul that she never will enter it again. She holds an envelope in her hand. She remembers that, delivering it to her, someone said to her:

"We hope that skilful Vittoria will soon come back. She is an old employee in whom we trust."

She opens the envelope, counts the money. Not a cent more, not a cent less than the wages owed; twenty, for illness contracted during work, just thirty-five lire.

Not a little present, for compensation, for the expense of the doctor, for dressings, for the strengthening broths that had to be given to the sick woman. The other time for that bronchial pneumonia they had received nothing; not even the payment of wages, but never mind, her mother was at the hospital. Now—how can they get along on thirty-five lire? They have to live and to eat. To think that the poor woman deceived herself so!

The steep way that is there a few steps away, seems very, very far, so weary are her limbs, so weak her muscles.

But her brain is like a bill-board, printed in big red letters.

Sixteen years in the workshop. The life of a factory hand—of that working woman—who cares? She earns enough not to die of hunger. For herself and her child, she is satisfied, she thanks God for it. But doesn't He understand that they are robbing her? Is there no one to defend her?

And if she is injured at work, as happened this time, she is paid simply her bare daily wage, provided her absence does not last too long, and if she becomes unable to work, let her turn to public charity or to the workhouse.

They are robbing her. What she gives is scandalously more than what she receives.

Her daughter will carry her away, of course; soon, within a year or two, when she also has become a good beast of burden. But what has happened, has happened. The factory will never wish to settle its debt to her.

Prosecuted, the factory would go to the wall, and be condemned. Pay your debts, thief!

In the vehemence of her indignation, the excitement has given back the quickness of her step to the young girl. She climbs the lane in such a rage that she seems not to touch the ground, with those old shoes worn down at the heels. And as if she would like to destroy them she crushes in her fingers the few dirty bills that sting her skin and her heart.

Every day has its evening.

But that evening she cannot rest.

At the kitchen table she writes verses. They are her deliverance when her heart is swelling. Her heart beats even up in her throat, at her wrists she feels the stinging of two bracelets of fire. She writes, that evening, to seal an act of injustice with her blood. She is discharging an imperative duty.

"The Hand in the Machine" is the title of the poem. But the story of the accident that happened to her mother is transformed by her pen and is no longer the same. In the short and vigorous lines, the woman becomes young, blonde and very beautiful and her hand is cut clean off.

Why?

The truth is simpler, less tragic, to be sure. Is that why it is so hard to express? In her fury she has allowed herself to be led astray into a disfigurement of the truth and it humiliates her, but she cannot remake what she has written.

Very carefully she hides the sheet. She will not show it to anybody.

The examinations for her degree are over. What weariness! But what a relief! She gets her teacher's diploma by a unanimous vote. A bit of paper, at last, that may mean the security of life.

On a golden July morning, she has said farewell, with sadness, to the shady plane tree of the school yard, to the cool porch, whose every stone has a meaning to her, and with less melancholy feeling, to her companions. Does she perhaps love things better than people?

In the afternoon, she went alone, covering her head with the little black veil of the peasant, to the house of her old teacher.

She found him in the garden, intent over some giant begonias, of whose luxuriant flowering he had the secret and never would give up to anyone. Broad-shouldered, muscular, in the fulness of his unspoiled seventy years, with that face of authority, etched on flint; with that voice of

authority, which, reading the divine Books so often, could change into sweetness and musical potency.

She shook his hand, she could only stammer: "I have come to thank you, Master."

Among the bushes (so dense was the garden, almost a wood) all the birds in the world were warbling. The heavens were of gold, and the childish clucking of a little fountain hidden behind groups of rose and blue hortensias seemed to say too: "Thank you, Master."

The old man suddenly raised her chin with his right hand, looking steadily into her eyes, into those eyes because of which no one could ever find her ugly. And he said to her gravely:

"You will let me know when you receive news of a prize. I want to congratulate you and to give you some books. Is your mother pleased?"

"Yes, very much."

He took her round through the garden, showing her all his wonders.

"Do you see? This mimosa would have died if

I had not cared for it just like a sick child. Flowers are worth more than people."

Just as she was saying good-bye to him, he remembered that he had once been a priest and he put his hand on her forehead with a sacerdotal gesture. Oppressed by a very sweet and painful emotion, she moved toward the gate, finding it impossible to speak. But the professor, on the threshold, held her firmly by one shoulder, leaned towards her and dragged from his soul the words that he was keeping locked within him because of a scruple, a kind of stern reticence:

"You can progress. You can do much. Study, write. Send me what you write. And remember your old Master—"

This, on my first road and along all the rest, was my viaticum.

Shall she indeed go away? leave her own city?

Dear, noble city of her childhood and of her youth!

The Square, with its lions of stone on guard be-

fore the cathedral, protected by the rather squat belfry, and wonderful with life in the months of early summer, when the seller of cocoons fills it with shining heaps of gold and of silver and the sturdy crowds from the lower part of the city swarm under the porticoes and in front of the church, with much gesticulating, much movement and smell and noise of humanity in action. Piazza Broletto, behind the cathedral, faces the plainer end of the church, ornamented, high up, with corbels and small arches of terra-cotta, so beautiful that by themselves they sing the praises of the Lord.

Churches, how many churches!

For resting, for dreaming, for praying.

When was the church called Santa Maria of Pain closed to the faithful? They all go to the Incoronata. The Incoronata is a jewel by Bramante, in whose interior majestic figures of Madonnas and saints dwell on walls encrusted with gold. The Church of the Coronation is all of gold, but the temple of St. Francis, poor, bare, not very large,

keeps watch, like the heart over the body. Via Tresseni, buried in green, looks like a by-path through the woods; Santa Maria of the Sun has the icy calm of a cloister. The Street of the Orphans is there, full of stones, yellow with lime and with sun, with the silent shadows on the right, over the monastical small doors, guarding the tombs that only one human being knows. More and more streets, solemn with historic names, Gaffurio, Fissinaga, Porta Reale, show rows of palaces which seem to have been deserted for centuries. And there is no stone moulding or leaf of kitchen-garden trailing from a wall, or curious effect of light and shade that is not surely for the girl the life of her life.

In the alleys and in the lanes the hand-organs stay for a moment, calling little girls and boys to the doors with discordant dance tunes. She stands motionless, on the corner, to listen to those melodies that seem to gush from the stones, and from the heart of the people, and when the street organ moves on, she follows it, a few steps away from

the mob of children, and she would like to follow it, who knows whither, all through the world.

The street of the Adda, with its sumptuous shops, like bursts of laughter. Between its loud colors and the gayety of the people, it climbs to the joy of the river, but it is certain that the river is the most beautiful—because it belongs to her.

And now to have to leave these good things.

For what other things? For a position as teacher which ought not indeed to be hard to find, in some little country school. Let it be the very humblest, just to begin. To earn one's bread, to let my mother rest, to say to her: "Now you have done enough, here am I." That is the essential thing. However, it is only a starting-point, because she means to go far, she feels the strength for it within her.

But that is the beginning. She cannot dodge it. The necessity cannot be evaded.

How will she get on with the children?

She does not love children. She has never noticed them. As a little girl, she never played with

dolls. When she grew taller she never took a baby in her arms with the spontaneous passion of adolescents in whom the maternal instinct is already awake. She is indifferent to the mystery of the child. She feels no need to solve it. And she will have to be with children most of the day, to teach them, to make herself obeyed, to make herself understood.

School, in its most elementary form. To straighten hand-writing, to make them see the difference between a and o, to correct lesson papers, to restrain the lively, to punish the quarrelsome, never to be her own self, but a tyrant over herself, so as to be able to control the brats.

She is irritated. There is something in her that will not consent, that rebels at being constrained. It is one thing to study, it is another thing to work for gain.

Until today, the pride of poverty has wonderfully protected her. Very different will be for her the poverty of tomorrow.

She will have to harden herself against herself. She is getting her courage ready for it.

They will break up their home, they will take everything with them; the marriage bed with the soft, soft mattress, the two worm-eaten chests of drawers, the unmatched chairs, the brass kettle and the pots which so much need tinning, the kitchen table worn and smooth at the corners and with one bad leg, on which she has written so many school exercises, struggling against sleep, and at strange almost inconceivable times, verses too.

And the dearest things. The remembrances of Giuditta Grisi, to which has been added a little wooden wedding chest that the grandmother kept jealously hidden, and which came to them by inheritance. Square, polished, with a lock and little key of silver, and a treasure hidden in its various compartments. A treasure; armlets, buckles from the theatre, earrings of brass and of false stones, and in the midst of all this tawdriness, the miniature of a man with a necktie in the style of 1830.

Where will they go? Who knows!

But my mother, one evening, says to her daughter, with that serenity that makes everything that concerns her easy and plain:

"Do you know? I have been thinking that when your appointment comes, it will be better for you to begin to get on without me. I can still work, at least for a few years. For I am not one to dismiss, to pension off! So, a few lire here and a few lire there. In the meantime you look over the country, seek and find suitable rooms, quietly and with consideration. Won't that be well, Dinin?"

Oh, yes, it will be all right. To leave each other even for a short time, will be hard, but all that she says is right, everything is clear, practical, based on the firmest foundations of living.

She stands there before her daughter, who is taller than she, but she holds her small body straighter, and her eyes shine more frankly, her smile is more serene. Not a muscle has weakened, not a line has been deepened on her marble brow.

Her right hand bears the stigmata of her deep wound, as she might wear a ring on her ring finger.

Suddenly a thought pierces the daughter's heart, rapid, blinding, a flash of heat lightning in a quiet night.

And if I should lose her? No. She will keep her near. She will not lose her.

The Garden of Time gazes upon her as if its leaves were eyes, in the sunlight of that breathless and cloudless summer. At night, too, it looks at her, bathing its deep masses of shadow in the blue moonbeams. It asks her:

"You will go away? Will you really go away?"

Their communion is ever longer, from soul to soul. She herself named it "The Garden of Time," because of the hours that she felt flowing by there, in a continuity of silence; and because one Sunday, at vespers, hearing the bells of the neighboring Church of the Carmine, she had there the feeling of having always heard and of having al-

ways to hear those bells ringing. The sense of eternity, birth abolished, death abolished. In Time.

She will carry her garden with her. And the bells of the Church of the Carmine. And Time. And also a hidden, precious beneficence, lately acknowledged within herself, that she confuses with the beating of her heart; the necessity for rest, for progress, for daily labor, but it is not the same thing, on the contrary wonderfully different. More than a beneficence, a strength, her very self, not the self that her mother adores, the life in line with that of the others and a simple village pupil waiting to become a teacher. The Other self, the true self, that no one will discover in her face, not even her mother; sacred, inviolate, without beginning, without end, rich with inextinguishable fires comparable to subterranean currents. Misfortunes, all kinds of humiliation may befall the pale, poor Dinin; but the Other, the True one, is above everything and all things. She is the queen incognito, that no one can hurt. Sometimes she feels her revealing herself and dominating the limited,

breathing, walking person with the power of an outburst of lava, and that generally happens when she, wandering alone, follows, along dark village lanes, the sound of the hand-organs. The narrow streets then lose their filthy dreariness to change, by enchantment, into vast and magnificent squares swarming with people. And ever thicker become the crowds, filling the air with their own sighs, with innumerable faces turned to the music of the hand-organ. But it is no longer that music, it is the harmony of words proceeding from the mouth of the Other one. Words that she does not yet know, only she feels their melodious sonority melting her spirit, a sweet consolation, which searches the hearts of men, and unites them, embraces them, penetrates and overwhelms them.

When the handle of the organ stops turning, and the catarrhal waltz or the halting mazurka is done, the vision also fades. The narrow street resumes the squalor of a blind alley, its scum of rogues brawling in front of the signs of the inns, and eluding them, Dinin becomes Dinin again.

For awhile Nani is not seen.

Sad news about him reaches them.

The baby died out at nurse, a few months after its birth; altercation on altercation at home; the irritations of love, sharpened by jealousy, by poverty ill-endured and by the violence of two rebellious natures. The tenants and the neighbors go about spreading reports, scandalized by nightly turmoil, furniture smashed, and yells and oaths in the dark. And every one of the stories is a stab in the back for the mother and the sister.

He reappeared, at twilight, unexpectedly, after the manner of cats. He does not seem to have come by the stairs, or come in through the front door. He is there when he is least expected, as if revealed by the sudden opening wide of a hiding-place in the wall.

It is raining in torrents, summer rain, not off and on but beating down incessantly, which in full dog-day and surprisingly bursts into the dark weeping of autumn and beats and flows in rushing rivers on the window panes of the kitchen balcony.

His sister has just then kindled a bright blaze in the fireplace, with old copy-books and unsightly copies of lessons covered with blots, corrections, and re-writings, and is about to prepare the vegetables for the soup. To keep the fire going she has added two pieces of wood. The bubbling of the pot, hanging by its black chain, was saying kind words to her, words of patience and of hope.

She turns around: "Oh, Nani! But then the front door was open?"

He answers her with a burst of laughter, of the kind perhaps that dies on one's lips.

How pale he is! Badly dressed, with his collar soft, his cuffs threadbare. He takes a chair, spins it round like a windmill, and sits astride on it.

His sister, a little doubtful, attempts a caress on his hair, thick and soft, woman's hair. Towards the back, a lock, white since his childhood.

"Is it you, at last! Is it the end of the world that brings you? And Daria? Stop and have a plate of soup. Mother will be back in an hour. She will see you, she will be happy."

"Oh, yes. Happy, happier, most happy. It would make you dance a polka, Dinin."

She cannot hold his eyes or keep him still for a moment. The everlasting disquiet of river water is in his eyes, in his brain, in the limbs of that twenty-year-old boy, already almost old.

He finally gets out:

"You know I am out of work—"

"Is it true then that things are not going well any more? That you are separated, you and Daria? They say that you are legally separated. Is it possible? And where will you go, now?"

"We don't need the prating of lawyers to do our business. Long live liberty! Daria is staying with her mother, that tight-wad of an Ignazia. I have sent my master and his most tiresome plans and waste papers stuffed with figures about their business. They did not give me enough to eat. I am sure of getting a place immediately, as conductor on the train between Treviglio and Bergamo. I shall look for a boarding place at Treviglio. I shall hardly fall on your hands again—"

"Nani!"

"I'm not meaning you; not you, stupid! But Daria is a slut."

"Nani—and what are you yourself?"

The cruel question came out impetuously and before she thought. She had not weighed its seriousness, and now she is horrified by it.

Silence, looking into each other's eyes this time. Then, as usual, derisive laughter.

"Some things will always be puzzles to you. These clever girls! They told me that you write verses. That may be! But you will never succeed in guessing these conundrums. Pare your vegetables, go along, little teacher. Do you want me to help you? These beans are too green. Well, you have finished your studies and I haven't. All right. Great news! But you have always had mother at your elbow and I haven't, not I."

He hums "Not I, not I" on the theme of the little song of the page Oscar, in the "Masked Ball," "Oscar knows well, but will not tell." Here

he begins to whistle a dance tune, with sweetness, admirably.

"You aren't just, Nani. You don't want to be just to her, to put yourself in the right. She could not hold you, but she has always been fond of you."

"That may be. But it is as if she had divorced me. You have to try it to know, for the proof of the pudding is in the eating. What do you know about it? It is as if at three years old I had been left an orphan by mother too."

Silence again. Beating of the rain on the panes. Dinin has put the turnips and beans on to cook in the earthen pot, and has curled herself up on the hearthstone.

Yes, Nani says the truth. An orphan. But not only without a father and also, as he thinks, without a mother.

Wholly an orphan.

He is one of those who are fatally born, unrelated to the mother who bears them. Do they love each other like other brothers and sisters? There

is a strange element in the affection that unites them that makes it the more intense because it is more full of pain. He can have no perception of the better part that has fallen to her, an equable temperament on a firm foundation, will-power. And when he digs his fingers into her shoulders and to kiss her, bites her, his action expresses love and rage.

But she wants to say a word of reconciliation:

"We ought to have our strength within ourselves, Nani. Why accuse other people?"

A pause. Then they change the subject by tacit agreement. They talk about the bad weather, about distant relatives, about certain purple plums that used to grow in the orchard of the house on the Street of the Orphans, about books.

A friend of Nani's, who was his classmate at High School and had now finished his course, had given him the Eclogues. Divine Virgil! The future conductor of the train running between Treviglio and Bergamo scans the hexameters with delight, and his sister, who knows no Latin, is quiet in

humility, bowing her head under the power of the music of the lines.

"Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi—"

So, forgetful of everything, far from everything but the Past, meditative as in church, their mother finds them.

Water drips from her shawl, her shoes are sponges. She is broken with weariness.

Surprised, she stares at her son. He, filled with fervor by the verses, his back to the door, does not see that look heavy with love, the look of an animal brooding over her young.

So many years will pass! So many changes.

Nani will leave Daria, he will go wandering through city and country, he will change his business, he will change his profession.

Time, work, resolves, affections, all will crumble in his hands.

Constant only to his one high passion, books, and in his weaknesses, dancing, wine, sterile loud-

voiced discussions, in coarse words, with companions excited by alcoholic fervor, at coffee-house tables or amid the smoke of saloons. At times some poor paramour, in tempestuous union, crazy over him, very soon tired of him. Not gifted enough to become an artist, not dull enough to stay on the tracks of some wretched employment at ninety lire a month, not enough a wandering cur to abandon himself entirely to the night life of the slums.

Uneasy everywhere. Always unsatisfied. Without an enemy because too inoffensive in his unprotected vacuity. Without a friend, for the weak have no friends.

Incapable of living but afraid of death.

His sister will only be able to see him again once in a while, at intervals of months and years. Weighed down by time, with nerveless heaviness, revealing his worn mainspring. Always slumping as he sits, always bursting with laughter between Boccaccian revelry and mournfulness, with the distortion of mocking laughter fixed on his lips, ready

for heavy jokes or for mouthing eternal Latin quotations between teeth turned black from too much smoking. A wreck. His kiss will taste of bitterness and of corrupt breath. He will never speak of Daria, but he will think of her without rest.

At bottom he is as gentle as a baby, with a pathetic need to surrender himself in his soul, to be caressed and taken care of by the hands and watchfulness of a devoted woman, but he will never be willing to confess it.

At last he will find a good position in the sales department of a large book-selling house.

Happy, this time, among the odors of freshly printed paper, among the piles of newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, books. To read everything, to live among the writings of imagination and of human thought, to travel and travel indefatigably while staying quietly in an office, perhaps this is his last refuge from which perchance he will not escape again.

But he is worn out, a tissue that is very thin

and poor. A small glass of brandy is enough to give him shooting pains in his stomach.

He falls ill of pleurisy after having danced a whole night of carnival at some party or other, braving, as so many years ago (but then it was with Daria with her white face and sinuous limbs) the folly of an interminable waltz.

The pleurisy develops into galloping consumption, and he dies at the hospital. Like his father. At thirty-three. He who had a horror of hospitals and of death.

His sister—who, the evening before, had left him unconscious in quiet sleep—was informed in the morning at five o'clock that he died during the night.

She got there in time to see him before by hospital rule he was carried away and lain bare, on the sloping marble slab, dripping with water, of the mortuary.

She found him in a private ward, full of empty beds. He is there, in the midst of all that glacial whiteness, in the glacial whiteness of the dawn.

Alone.

Never had she seen a creature in the world so alone.

She should have at least stayed near him during the night. Who moistened his lips?

The sheet covers him to the chin. But that thing that is sunk in the pillow is no longer the face of a man. It is the impression in stone of excessive pain that will not have peace in eternity. The man died bearing malice. If death is not repose, what is it then?

His sister dares not approach that mask to seek in it the traces of the dear face. It is very far away from her, hostile, unapproachable. She will always have it before her eyes, but to rejoin it, to recognize it, she also must die.

O Nani, your old mother, how she weeps, how much she weeps!

It is no one's fault, brother.

Colomba, Celeste, Lucia are the names of the three sisters who govern the girls' boarding-school

where the little seventeen-year-old teacher will go in October, to supply the place of a primary class teacher who has left for Rome. The compensation in money is pitiful, but she will have bed, board, and laundry.

It is time. We are in August. But until now no competition for a public-school position in the country has been announced to her, and she does not think she has any right to spend the winter at home for nothing.

The school is the only important one in a little town not far from her own. She has seen it. She stayed there three days on the invitation of the head mistress, Colomba, who, very likely, wanted to study her before accepting her as a house mistress.

It has a very large garden, partly cultivated in orchards (and already plums and splendid peaches were ripening there)—but it is enclosed. There is a wide court, shaded by holm-oaks with thick foliage, which must be full of nests—but it is closed. Everything there is hermetically

sealed, also the face of Colomba, the head mistress.

The head mistress Colomba belongs to the category of women who, young or old, are invariably designated as "of a certain age."

It does not seem as if she could ever take off the very close-fitting black dress—which is to her what his uniform is to a general—not even at night. She looks as if she were standing even when she is seated, and you cannot think of her as relaxed in the abandonment of sleep. Her head is all of one color, hair, eyes, cheeks, lips. You can't tell how it happened but it is so.

Nevertheless, those eyes of an indefinable color can become terrible if they are fixed on anybody. They attach themselves to your person, they measure it, they strip it, not leaving even a thought uninvaded.

The true professional eyes of a ruler, which no one will ever be able to resist, to lie to, to disobey.

The director Colomba has one peculiarity of which she willingly speaks, rather boasting of it.

After every meal (and God knows whether her repasts are copious) she feels the need to eat up a whole crescent roll, without anything else. It supplies the place of coffee to her. Any time that she should not do it, it would seem to her as if she had not eaten.

Her sister Celeste looks after the wardrobe, the domestic affairs, and above all, the kitchen. She swings along on fleshy flanks, and her jolly round face, with two windows of the innocent color of her name, looks like an August moon when it rises, placid and rosy, through the quiet airs. She has the tranquil and rolling motions of a person delighting in existence and in herself. She is not interested in the boarding-school misses, except as regards their physical well-being. She does not read, the only book for her worthy to be consulted is the "King of Cooks," but nobody can confuse her in the accounts. In two dishes she is inimitable, ragout of frogs and fricassee with little new potatoes. She is happy to hear it said to her. Secretly she drinks cognac.

Lucia is the youngest of the sisters. She may or she may not have reached forty. She paints in water-color, embroiders on colored satin, is most skillful in netting lace, teaches writing and drawing, subjects genteel and feminine. She is rather fat, very dark, and her eyes disappear behind her too long lashes. The two older sisters, old maids for life and death by divine decree, say of her with pride, as of a thing absolutely essential to the honor of the family:

"Oh, Lucia will marry."

The triad is perfect, a constellation.

But shortly behind the indomitable authority of Colomba comes, in the school, that of Madame Erminia, the head mistress, born and grown to be a teacher and nothing but a teacher, a big woman of plain ugliness, of dictatorial ways, of cutting speech, who holds teachers and scholars in her fist, and look out if she tightens her fingers.

The school, where you get up at the sound of a bell, go to classes at the sound of a bell, go to the table and say your prayers at the sound of a bell,

where you may never be alone, never, never, not even in bed, for every teacher has to sleep in a dormitory in which there are at least ten girls. And you can't even think, because the director Colomba clutches at your most secret thoughts, with those eyes whose color no one can tell.

You will be obliged to let yourself be stretched on those spiritual racks of the Holy Inquisition, become a kind of novice, with stiff gestures, torpid soul, your will blotted out, accustom your nostrils to that odor of staleness, bind halters on your soul so that it cannot stamp.

May it be only for a short time, until she can succeed in winning that blessed competition, which is still a dream.

Will she be able to hold out till then?

Until today, thanks to her mother, she had been Princess of Poverty in the Garden of Time, but reality spares no one. Now that she has it before her, she feels and measures within her, even in her dumb fear, the courage to face it, in its wretched brutality. She will make an experi-

ment in living and she will cure her bruises too. Isn't it so for everyone? Isn't it just that it should be so?

She feels a strange will to suffer, simply to know. But she wants to suffer with her eyes open, with a watchful mind. No one will be able to touch the liberty of her soul. And then, is the Other self not there? Of whom can she be afraid, if the Other lives?

She grinds out such thoughts within herself, absorbed in her work of inward preparation, spending one day, with her head down according to her custom, along the ancient alleys, bursting with the freshest green of the kitchen-gardens, when, suddenly, two arms are embracing her, joyous laughter, a voice like a song.

"Here you are at last! I have never seen you since the last day of school! Aren't you ashamed?"

It is Drusilla, open-faced, warm-hearted, kindly-speaking, the school companion who most sincerely wished her well, without ever asking for any return. Has she herself returned this affection? No,

it does not seem so to her. Her mother away, she is fond of no one.

"Why," begs the kind creature, "won't you stop a minute at my house? Father is at the office. We are just two steps away, you know. And then, you don't know the news. Great news! I am to be married in September. I am marrying Sandro, of course. Don't you remember? My Sandro."

How should she not remember? To the end of her preparatory classes Drusilla used to study her lessons and write her exercises thinking of Sandro, talking of Sandro. She used to pretend in class to be taking notes, to have time to scribble letters to Sandro, crammed with exclamations and absurdities. All the school-fellows knew about Sandro's mustachios and the parting in his hair, his amorous agitations in the present and his intentions for the future, his squeaking shoes, and certain small, unimportant infidelities that the serene Drusilla could forgive him.

But were there not many in school in love with a "Sandro," near or far, faithful or not, of flesh

and bones, or else simply fancied, thinking of whom every burden seemed light, even the pedantic discourses, algebraic equations, and lessons in applied physics?

There were many, but not herself.

How light is Drusilla's work-room! Linens, laces, embroideries, ribbons, scattered on the shelves and on the little tables, make it brighter still. Her father has not minded expense. He wants his daughter to be a credit to him in the home that is waiting for her. The trousseau is worthy of a rich young lady. But she does the sewing herself, for she has clever hands.

"If you knew," she says, "how lovely it is to make your own trousseau, to think of a new home, to have a betrothed lover, to say to yourself, 'In a month I shall marry him!' Your diploma? Who ever thinks of it? I have put it in a box. Sandro has a good business now. He will not let me work for wages. Oh, do you know, my Sandro, I have developed him expressly for myself!"

Those laces, those linens are too naïve, there is

too much warmth in the air, there is too much happiness in that voice. The outcast finds an excuse, embraces her, and departs.

"Nani, is love really necessary?" she had asked her brother one day. He had answered, deriding her:

"You understand nothing about it—"

Perhaps love is not to be her fate. Neither the passion of Nani and Daria, tempestuous as hate, nor the pure wedded affection of Sandro and Drusilla, burning with moderation, like the little domestic fire in a little middle-class house. To each one his own way. For her, next October, the boarding-school with the formidable eyes of Colomba the director recalling the spy-holes to the sleepless vigilance of prison walls, with the veiled, pitying smiles of the rich scholars, glancing askance at the worn shoes and the poor dyed garments of the young teacher.

And afterwards?—Who knows?

Coming home that night from her labor, her mother finds her depressed, speechless, with a sad,

drawn, grey face. She does not want to eat. She goes to sleep late, after having turned over and over every which way of the bed, by the side of the dear woman who is overcome by weariness but kept awake by anxiety. Hardly has Dinin fallen into deep sleep, when she finds herself, as if by enchantment, on the road that leads to the station.

It is no longer night. It is not day either. Diffused in space, a doubtful light, like that which is seen looking at the sky through yellow glass. The air is heavy and without motion, a bunch of wadding.

She walks and walks. She is going to take a train for a distant country, but she does not know what train, nor what country. She walks and walks. And lo, she perceives that she is without a handbag. Where has she left it? What will she do at the school without her suitcase? Then she perceives that she is without shoes and without stockings. Her bare feet hardly touch the ground and do not suffer from being bare. But how can she

appear before the director without shoes and without stockings?

They will think that she is a beggar. They will chase her away.

She would like to turn back. She no longer knows the way. It is no longer hers, the street whose name she does not know and whose end she cannot see, bordered by deserted houses and by fields. She asks a woman, wrapped in a mantle, who directs her to a place near by. "Is this the road that leads to the station?" The woman turns round: "There are no stations hereabout." And in turning she laughs, and she recognizes her. It is Daria. Those are her pointed teeth, her eyes of china blue, without eyebrows. She would like to ask her: "Why did your baby die? Why have you deserted Nani?" She does not get it out in time. She has disappeared.

And she goes on and on and on until she finds another woman. She asks her too: "Is this the road to the station?" She has already seen that tall figure at other times, that imperial profile.

It is the Countess Augusta, with the dress she wore at her last ball, of pink gauze, with innumerable flounces, and in her hair a garland of jasmine.

"This? This is the way of love. Don't you see the many roses?"

And she too disappeared.

Roses? She cannot see any. Perhaps they have hidden because they want none of her, like this, without shoes, without stockings, without handbag. Like this, dressed like a pauper. She must go and find them. But on her feet, shivering, she feels the chill of water. No more streets nor meadows, everywhere water. From where did she come? It is dark, quiet, as far as the eye can reach. It is impossible to save oneself. Already it rises to her knees, the frost of that thing of waves reaches her heart, unfriendly, malign, that wishes her ill, that will suffocate her.

"Mother!"

Her mother, who was beginning to get drowsy, roused herself with a start at the dreadful cry,

and drew close into her arms the girl burning with fever.

In the train for Pandino, a rough country town of the low country, one afternoon in the last ten days of August.

Several violent attacks of nervous fever have left her very pale and weak, her nostrils have sharpened, a dark circle round her eyes never leaves her.

Her mother, troubled, has said to her:

"Write to your Aunt Nunzia, ask her to let you come to her farmhouse for a few weeks. She cannot say no to you. After all, you are her brother's daughter. You will breathe a little fresh air, you will be merry. Indeed you ought to get into good condition to work this autumn. In peasants' homes the food is not good, I know, but for women like us, accustomed to milk and to soup, it doesn't matter much."

"And you, mother, all alone?"

"I? Don't think of it. Go, my blessing."

And here she is on the train for Pandino.

How many flies! And what heavy closeness! The little train proceeds with much difficulty, with bouncing and much shaking. In the third-class compartments, dirty with waste paper and rubbish, a few evil-smelling countrymen are discoursing among themselves about cows and about crops, chewing tobacco and spitting freely. A peasant woman in a corner is nursing her baby, with her eyes closed under the oppression of the great heat, and drops of filthy sweat run down between her breasts. Aunt Nunzia is ready at the barrier of the little village station. She looks sharply with her little eyes, laughs with all her wrinkles, opens her arms. She is small, round, good-natured, but why so many wrinkles? Her broad face is a riddle. She recalls, grown older, the face of "mother's husband," reproduced in the single small picture (a daguerreotype) which is kept at home, but the niece forces herself in vain to hear within herself the call of race.

They make their way on foot, by foot-ways

through the fields, towards the farmhouse. The excessive heat has veiled the sun, the sky is eclipsed by blinding mists, everything is grey with dust, suffering from drought, motionless in a kind of deadness.

A great number of questions Aunt Nunzia addresses to her neice, who answers them with sweetness, but thinking of other things. Rather she thinks of nothing at all. With expanded lungs, she breathes in her natural elements, the country and summer. All her senses respond, docile, satisfied, to that flat country which discloses no boundaries unless they be the sky, and they rest, without longings, upon that fixed uniformity of line. In the fields people are working, but the figures of the peasants form a part of the boundless solitude. Are they working or praying? She feels that she might be able to pray here, amid the wide extent of Indian corn and the perfume of the August day, as under the arches of the Church of San Francesco.

Until now they were unknown to her, the waves,

the hills, the mountains. For her the world consists of that changeless plain, intersected by the rectilinear rows of the mulberry trees, by the geometric flowing of ditches and of canals, and which yet are dissolved in the transparence of the air and in the sublime arch of the sky in a beauty in which everything is calmed.

If she were to give form to her own spirit, it would be such and no other.

A few steps from the farmhouse, the disagreeable smell of a dung-hill offends her nostrils, penetrates her throat and her stomach with the violence of a bodily acridity, but it does not shock her. On the contrary it pleases her, like a strong liquor. It seems to her that to breathe it in for a long time would intoxicate her, but at the same time would cure her.

Also the barn pleases her, well built, with the door encumbered with wagons and farm implements, with a dwarf fig tree rooted in the corner on the east, and in a circle the haystacks, and beyond the stables. The kitchen, too, with its low

fireplace, and the flowered plates shining in the racks, and many benches all around, as at an inn, on which they eat with their cups in their hands.

Her head does not ache any more. That country smell, that quietness of rural life lull her in the lethargy of well-being which is, however, only of the body.

Her heart is still with her mother. Sad are the nights far away from her. The sky over the barn lies low, an August sky heavy with stars. At sudden moments some one of them goes out, with a spasm and a vibration in its death struggle. The overseer, gnarled as a willow, smokes his pipe among the jesting servants. She stays near them, humble, a stranger. She thinks that she is alone in noticing the death of those stars. Her culture is worth nothing to her, at least in making herself understood by those people of her extraction who live in community with the soil without having its purity, with the cows, the hens, the pigs, with-

out the innocence that makes them irresponsible and sacred. She is troubled by their coarse language, by their vulgar gestures, by the reek of sweaty flesh, by the bad food, to which she would prefer (but she does not dare to ask for it) a cup of milk, warm from the cow.

Hard, restless, troubled night on a bed with a crackling and prickling straw mattress, with rough hempen sheets, surrounded by the harsh snoring of stout, perspiring women.

After awhile she drowses, when a cry, discordant in her ears, makes her start up.

It is the crowing of the cock.

She has never before heard it out in the country, nor so near, nor so disagreeably.

Very softly she steps onto the floor. No motion in the beds beside hers. They are all still asleep in the other rooms, too, but it will surely be but for a short time. She goes out, very quietly, onto the wooden gallery.

The cock repeats his tune, his voice sharp, im-

perious, full of joy and of arrogance. It cuts the air with very sharp notes. From farms, from cottages, others answer with aggressive, almost fierce gayety.

Up! Enough of sleeping! Enough of dreaming! Up, to work! There is no way out of it!

It is before the dawn, everything motionless.

On the horizon, the morning star alone, intent like a long look.

To the girl the countryside appears as yet but a mass of shadows, broken here and there by grey ghosts of cottages, and yet she smells it bathed in dew, all fresh and ready for the new day's work.

The earth. That gives bread. Here it is. She holds it with her eyes. She can go down, touch it, embrace it, disappear in it. One thing alone with her, living and fructifying.

Thus, as a child, she had heard the Garden of Time speaking one spring dawn, and she understood its language, and seeing the morning clouds

wandering through the air hand in hand, she understood that heaven was within her as she was in heaven. The sensation of eternity which today repeats itself. The essential truth. To be alive, alive and here.

Her infancy sinks into limitless distance, her youth faces limitless horizons. Her breath rises from the humid depths of the earth to finally reach up to that star that has stayed the longest before the day. It is I. I am here, she thinks, seeing herself in space as in a mirror. Work? To be worthy of living? Very good. Until now I have brooded and gathered, a mere lump of clay in the night. The brutal awakening of the cocks tears the silence, destroys meditation, but it is necessary to her too, and because necessary, sacred.

Under the brightening sky the outlines of terrestrial objects begin to be discerned. Slow rollings of wheels already sound from the wagons. The door of the farmhouse creaks on its hinges. In the dimness of the first light comes forth the

overseer with his two eldest sons, straight for the fields. The guttural call of one of the maids is heard, opening the stables to lead the cows to pasture.

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